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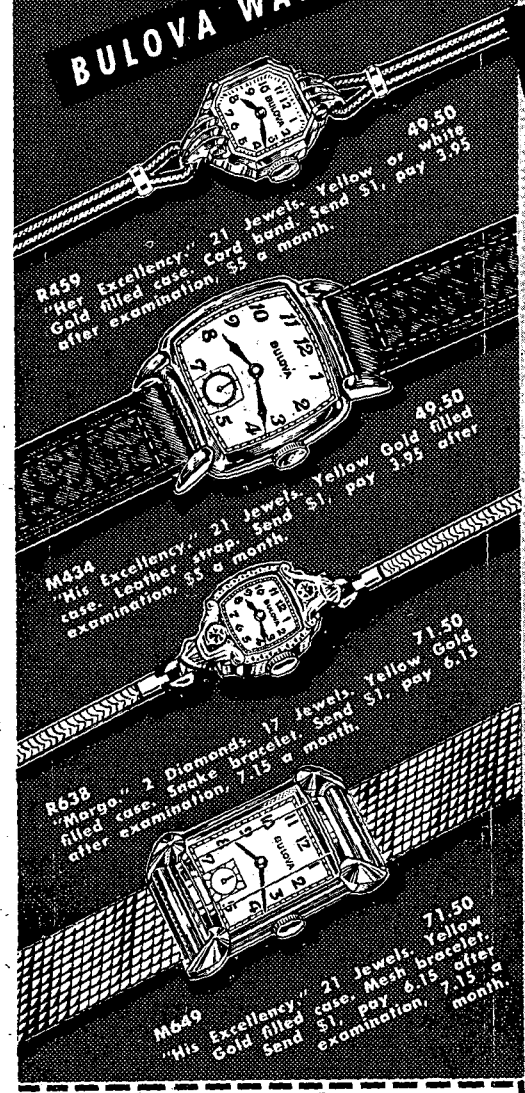

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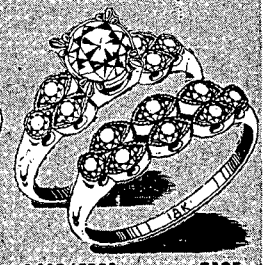

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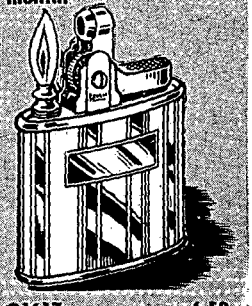

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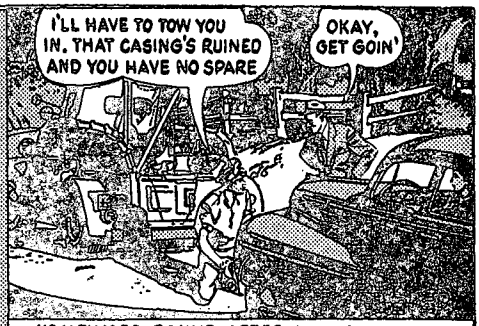
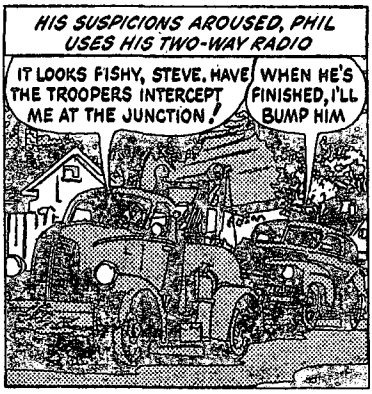


HOMEWARD BOUND AFTER A LONG NIGHT OF ROAD SERVICE CALLS, PHIL MILLS HAS BEEN FLAGGED DOWN AND ASKED TO FIX A FLAT...


HIS SUSPICIONS AROUSED, PHIL USES HIS TWO-WAY RADIO
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THIS TELETYPE WILL BRING PHOTOGRAPHERS HERE IN DROVES
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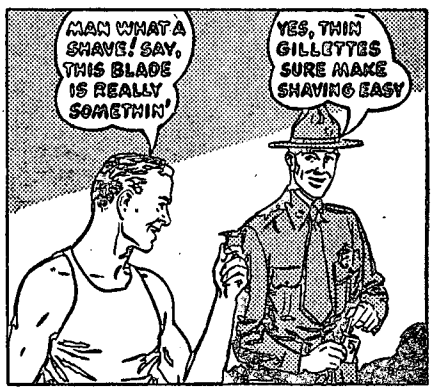
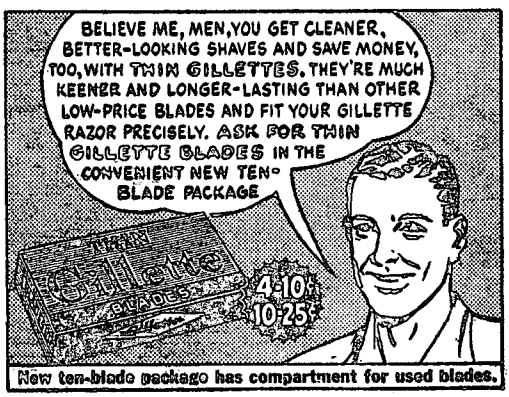


YOU'RE OKAY IN MY BOOK, SON. I'M COUNTING ON SEEING YOU TOMORROW
THAT MEANS A SWELL JOB FOR MILLS, OR I DON'T KNOW THE OLD MAN
HOUR LATER


BELIEVE ME, MEN, YOU GET CLEANER, BETTER-LOOKING SHAVES AND SAVE MONEY, TOO, WITH THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE MUCH KEENER AND LONGER-LASTING THAN OTHER LOW-PRICE BLADES AND FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTE BLADES IN THE CONVENIENT NEW TEN-BLADE PACKAGE
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25¢ FANTASTIC Novels MAGAZINE

Vol. 2 NOVEMBER, 1948 No. 4

Book-Length Novel

THE TERRIBLE THREE — **Tod Robbins** — 8

Three there were—one monstrous body, one cunning brain, one soul of evil incarnate—but as one they wreaked their unholy vengeance, on a bloody trail back—to what incredible horror?

Stories

THE MAD PLANET — **Murray Leinster** — 82

Picture a world thirty thousand years in the future—a world dominated by insects, where man is a terrified slave. . . . Set sail with Burl down the river of a million perils—and find a new high in fantasy!

ENVIRONMENT — **William Holloway** — 112

Can a scientist change into a caveman in one split-second revelation of death's meaning? Dillon Weston had a chance to find out—or die!

WHAT DO YOU THINK? — 6

The Readers' Department.

THE NEW FINLAY PORTFOLIO — 111

IN THE NEXT ISSUE — 121

Cover by Finlay. Inside Illustrations by Lawrence and Finlay.

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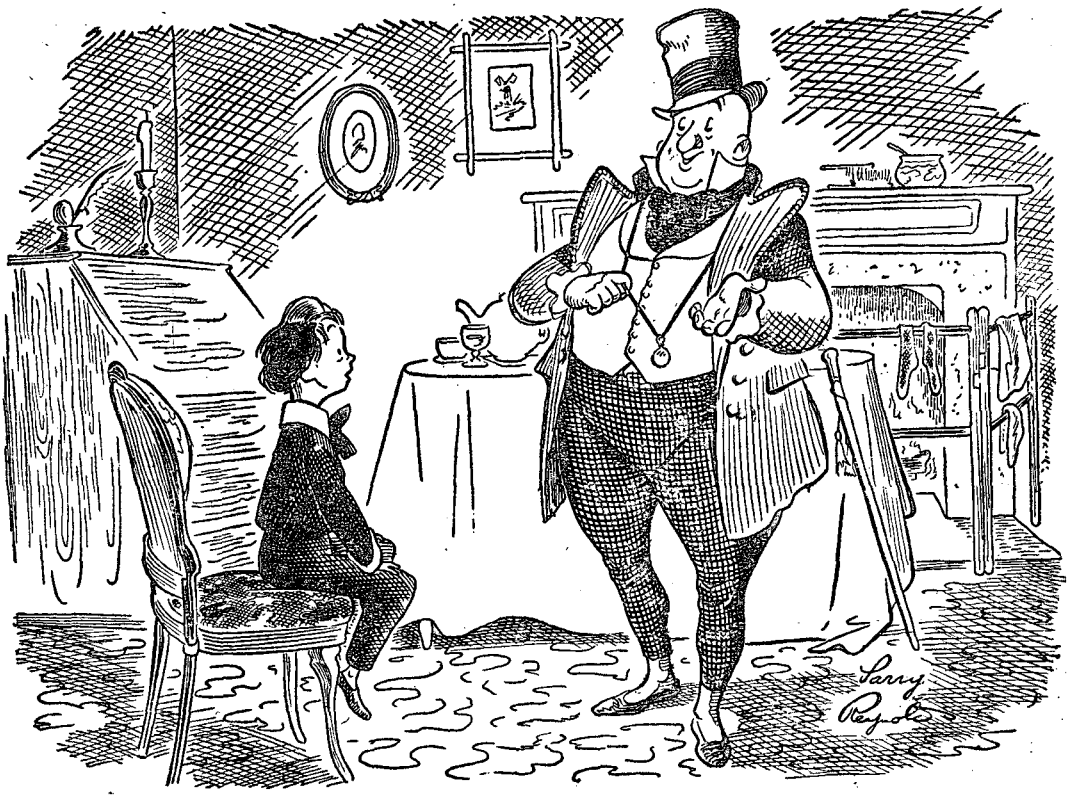

Mr. Micawber was only half-right!

MR. MICAWBER'S financial advice to young David Copperfield is justly famous.

Translated into United States currency, it runs something like this:

> "*Annual income, two thousand dollars; annual expenditure, nineteen hundred and ninety-nine dollars; result, happiness. Annual income, two thousand dollars; annual expenditure, two thousand and one dollars; result, misery.*"

But Mr. Micawber was only half-right!

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Fantastic Novels, New Publications, Inc., 210 East 43rd St., New York 17, N. Y.

READ "SECOND DELUGE" IN STORM

Dear Editor:

Just finished "The Second Deluge." The story was great, one of the best "disaster" stories I've read. End of civilization is always a good theme; it's an idea that has so many possibilities, that it is almost impossible to use them all.

Serviss' story surprised me by seeming short in spite of its 116 pages. I liked the way it was worked out, the absence of any love interest only added to the tale. Reading the story during a rain and wind storm really set a mood that would be hard to beat.

The description of the flood, rain, and all-over effects was about the clearest and best I've ever read. The people were true to type, throughout. The absence of wild heroism and bathos kept T S D from being just another pulp story.

How about more from Serviss in the near future? The "Check List of Fantasy" has the names of three other novels, all much shorter. "Edison's Conquest of Mars", is easily obtainable now, but the others are, I believe, semi-unobtainable.

Once again, I want to protest against reprinting F.N. and F.F.M. stories. There are too many unused stories waiting for us. In years to come, it would be OK to re-use the Merritt-tales and etc., but for now give us something else, please. Something by Binder or Kline, any unused story, would be appreciated.

At any rate, thanks for F.N. I missed it.

WRAI BALLARD.

Blanchard, N. Dak.

JULY ISSUE GOOD

I enclose the price of a year's subscription to *Fantastic Novels*. That subscription copy will be used for reading and to give away, later, to someone who ought to get acquainted with the magazine. From the stack of F.N.'s at the newsstand I also select the most perfect copy I can find, and this unopened, unread copy will be bound in cloth and placed in my library.

It is hard indeed to decide which is the most

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entertaining publication, F.F.M. or *Fantastic Novels*. Each, of course, is tops in its particular field. F.N. started late, but look at the swell material it will draw from! Its source is fully as good as F.F.M's, if not better. F.F.M., in my opinion, has never come up with a dud issue, and I don't see how F.N. can, either. Looks like happy days ahead for the fantastic-story fan! All that is needed now is for both magazines to get on a monthly basis.

Your July issue was good, and I was glad to see Merritt set aside long enough to allow a story by some other author to appear. Not that there is anything wrong about Merritt's splendid writings, but variety, even in excellent reading matter, is desirable. Both long and short for July were good enough to keep a reader absorbed; the cover was a dandy and inside drawings adequate. The double-page drawing of the Ark on pages 6 and 7 was the first picture of an Ark I have ever seen that really looked big enough for the job!

But why go on? Your readers' department is already filled and running over with praise.

I want back numbers of all kinds of fantastic and weird magazines issued prior to 1945. If any who read this have anything of the sort to sell, please contact me. I only want items in near-perfect condition; do not care for anything that shows signs of excessive handling or that does not have covers. I am also trying to complete a set of the works of Sir Rider Haggard and would like to hear from anyone having anything by that author for sale.

In closing, I want to urge you to keep your magazine the same size it now is. As for the trimmed edges, I rather like 'em untrimmed; just as they now are. And please, please don't cut down the stories when you publish them. Let's have them as they appeared originally. Past publishing by other firms have been all but ruined by abbreviation.

J. P. GUINON.

P. O. Box 214,
Little Rock, Ark.

VICTIM OF VANPORT FLOOD

Everyone knows of the disastrous flooding of Vanport City in which thousands of people lost all of their belongings.

Among the victims of the Vanport flood was Don Berry, 17, youngest member of the Portland Science-Fantasy Society. Though he and his family fortunately escaped with their lives, they lost virtually all their possessions, including Berry's extensive collection of science-fiction magazines and books.

As fandom's own contribution to flood relief, the Portland S-F Society is taking donations of magazines, books and cash to replace Don Berry's lost collection.

If you want to help, send any duplicates of other magazines and books you are willing to part with to Don Berry, c/oPSFS, 3435 NE 38th Ave., Portland 13, Ore.

DONALD B. DAY, *Pres.*,
Portland Science-Fantasy Society.

(Continued on page 122)

Worth a King's Ransom at a time like this...

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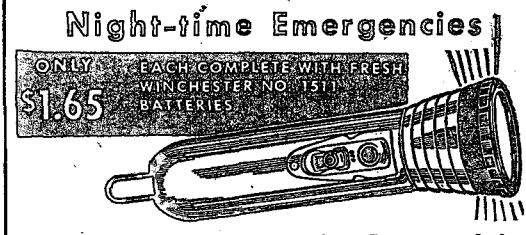

They may overtake you at any time. Go to your dealer today and buy 2 new No. 6410 Winchester Deluxe Dual-Purpose Spotlights for your car or home. Each spotlight is 2 lights in 1—WHITE for safety . . . RED for danger. Made from solid brass, chrome plated with red translucent lens ring. Two spotlights cost only $3.30 complete with batteries—isn't that a small price to pay for freedom from fear and worry when night-time emergencies arise?

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The fantastic figure began to bound forward along the little moonlight path.

The Terrible Three

Three there were—one monstrous body, one cunning brain, one soul of evil incarnate—but as one they wreaked their unholy vengeance, on a bloody trail back—to what incredible horror?

By Ted Robbins

CHAPTER I

GIANT HATRED IS BORN

IT WAS a hot day. Beads of perspiration stood on Tweedledee's frowning forehead; and, although he rubbed them away repeatedly with a tiny silk handkerchief, still they would form again with military monotony and charge down into his eyes.

Opposite him, on the other side of the tent, he could see Mme. Fatima. She sat all slumped over in her chair, a great mountain of purple, painful flesh, about which a legion of summer flies buzzed wrathfully.

Shaking her head from side to side, she shot vindictive glances from her small pig-like eyes at the Human Skeleton on her right—a West Indian, who basked in the fierce heat like some bronze snake in the tropical sunshine, and who repaid her attention with a triumphant, but sickly smile.

On Tweedledee's face, first, was mirrored

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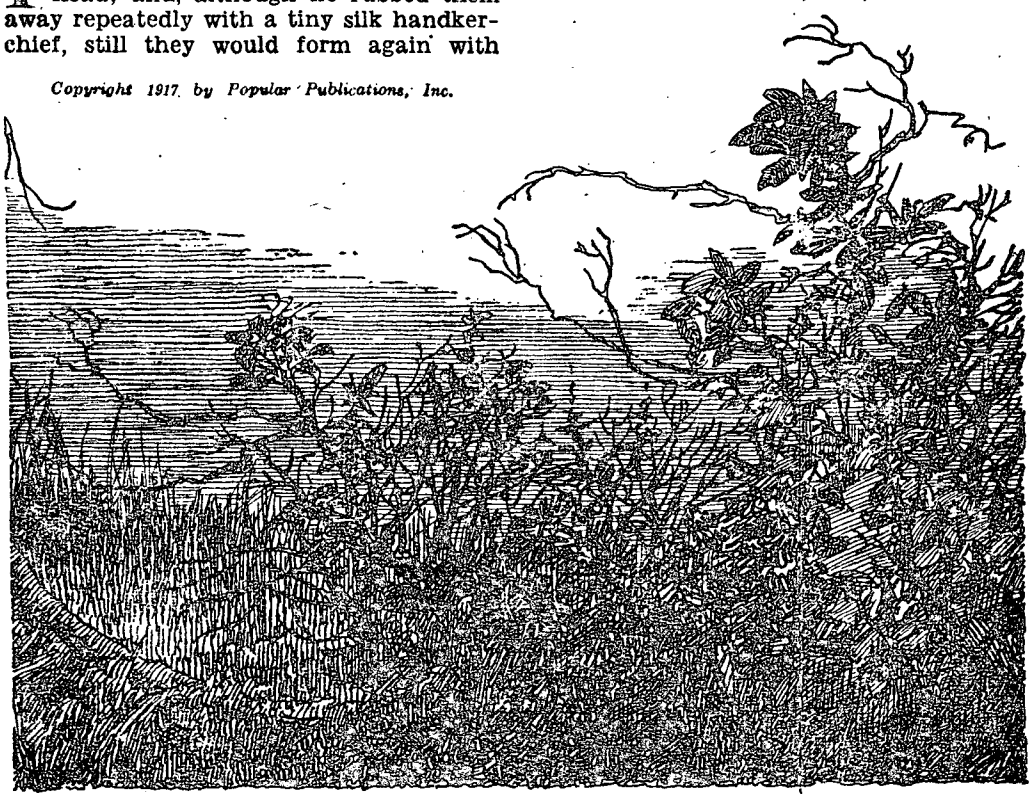

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the smile of the Indian as he noted the fat woman's bloated hands and bloodshot eyes. But his glance followed hers and became fixed on the Human Skeleton—on that long, lizardlike figure basking on its platform as though it were a rock beneath a blazing sun—when he perceived the full animal pleasure depicted in every loose-lying joint of that bony frame—the light of anger in Mme. Fatima's eyes was as nothing to the red-hot fury that poured out of his.

He even jumped out of his toy chair, and, stretching himself to his full stature of two feet three inches, shook his tiny fist at the Human Skeleton and cursed him heartily in a voice like a squeak.

At this the West Indian's thin-lipped smile broadened; and, shivering an affected shiver, he wrapped himself up to the chin in a heavy black robe that lay beside him. The dwarf's anger waxed into a consuming flame; his little round, shoe-button eyes flashed and his soft, chubby face writhed into a terrible mask.

It was as though the expression of a baby had been suddenly transformed before your eyes into the expression of a murderer, only, the voice issuing from between the twisting lips was pitifully weak and ineffective.

"I wish you were dead, you human clothes-hanger!" he squeaked, shaking his fists at the skeleton. "I wish you were dead, and I had done it!"

A grinning attendant aproached Tweedledee's platform and warned the dwarf to silence with an uplifted finger.

"Cut it out, Tweedy," he said, "cut it out. This ain't no way to behave. The people will be comin' in here from the big show, and dwarfs with grouches don't make a hit. They want to find yer smilin'. You remember what the old man said? You ain't so small that you can run this circus."

"I'd kill him!" muttered Tweedledee, with his eyes still fixed on the West Indian. "I'd kill him!"

"If you was big enough, sure. But you ain't, and what's more you ain't so small neither. Why, Hop o' My Thumb was inches shorter than you, and he hadn't half your lip. He didn't do anything but just grin all day."

"An idiot!" growled Tweedledee.

"Maybe so," assented the attendant. "But believe me, he knew enough to keep his job. He wasn't all the time cuttin' up rough. Now look here—" he laid a big brown hand on the dwarf's shoulder, spinning him around till the little, convulsed face looked up into his— "the boss'll chuck you if you start anything! Dwarfs such as you are common as dirt."

"Leave go of me," screamed Tweedledee in a final burst of anger. "Take your hands off me, I say!" and he suddenly struck the attendant in the face with all the strength of his puny arm.

The circus man burst out laughing and, picking the squirming dwarf up with one hand, deposited him forcibly in his toy chair, held him there till he grew quiet, and then, with a final admonitory shake of his finger, went off to join a companion at the entrance of the tent.

"Tweedy's got 'em again," he said by way of explanation.

"It's lucky Hercules ain't that way," said his friend. "We'd have lively times around here if he was—lively times. But I wouldn't be handling Tweedy rough when the big one's around, Bill. They're pretty thick, them two. The big one thinks a lot of Tweedy."

"What, Old Hercules? Why, he wouldn't hurt a fly. God, but it's hot! Lady Fatima will lose her job if this weather keeps up. She looks like a piece of butter, now. Lord, how that woman sweats!"

Now the strains of martial music wafted in through the tent door, and a half-witted Negro, who posed as the Wild Man from Borneo, began to dance and jabber. But far wilder than he, far blacker than he, were the thoughts that danced and jabbered on the fantastic floor of Tweedledee's brain.

He sat in his little chair, his chin resting on one hand, a ridiculous caricature of Rodin's "Thinker," staring at the ground with black, unseeing eyes, while before his mental vision floated scenes of violence—scenes of daring—scenes where he was ever the central figure, a new transformed self, a stranger to another, but not a stranger to his own soul.

And this other self—this gigantic, towering self—would live on a pedestal of fear.

Men would fear him, and he would read this fear in their eyes.

He would frown, and they would tremble; he would stretch out his hand, and they would flee.

Death would be written on his forehead; strength would pulse in his muscles; and cunning would creep with padded feet through his brain. So it would be, if he were that other self of his dreams.

Oh, God; if this body that we wore, this caricature that made him a laughingstock for the mob to jibber at, that turned his

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solemnity of soul into a tidbit of jest for others, his anger into merriment, his very violence into the mimicry of violence—Oh, God! if this body were only some kind of monstrous cocoon through which he could burst out into the sunlight of the world—how he would stretch his wings; how he would fly away to the meadows! How he would mingle with the bright but evil flowers that he held so dear!

And he would not forget what had gone before—the torture in the eyes of the curious, the laughter in the mouths of the fools, this pillory in which he had stood since boyhood—these things should never be forgotten.

All that he asked—all that he had ever asked—was to be taken seriously; and yet no one had granted him this simple wish. Most had laughed, some had pitied, but none had understood—none had looked upon him as a human being like themselves.

No, he had been a doll, a plaything for all these vulgar children of the world—children who paid to see him move his head, open his mouth and speak—children quite careless of the inner workings of their doll—children of the materialistic world.

And, as he grew older, the inner workings of this doll changed; strange transformations took place; the springs of good corroded with rust, and soon the green mould of evil covered everything.

AT FIRST his heroics had been of a childlike character. He wished to be considered good, noble, brave. He desired to become a hero. He acquired a stately carriage, only to see the people before his platform convulsed with merriment.

He soon learned that this was an impossible rôle to play. Whatever he did was humorous.

When he gave to poverty, poverty laughed in his face and called him half-witted. All professions except that of clown were closed to him.

Once he had attempted to rescue a little boy who was being beaten by a larger one, and he had been thrashed within an inch of his life. This was a colossal joke. The whole city had laughed over it, and it had been given a leading place in the local newspapers: "Tweedledee Is Trimmed," "Youth Will Be Served"—yes, he remembered those headings even now, and that was years ago.

And so, the materialistic children had closed their eyes to the inner workings of their doll, but the inner workings had changed so much—so very much. Every one who has the ability to love greatly also has the ability to hate greatly. Every one who has the ability for great goodness also has the ability for great evil.

A murderer is often merely a perverted hero. Tweedledee, perceiving that his heroism went for naught with his audience, turned to the other side of his nature. He must be considered seriously at any cost.

And this other self had answered him—this other evil self had spoken in a new, strange tongue—this other evil self which had been sleeping and was now awake.

Very gradually it had been growing in him, for months it had been gaining the ascendency in his mind, till now it sat enthroned in the crimson robes of sin, a monarch whose every whisper must be obeyed—a monarch that called to life the evil spirits of his soul.

Tweedledee, like all great egoists, must play a leading part on the stage of life; and, if the audience was not pleased with him in the rôle of hero, if they laughed and hooted him off the boards, there was another part to play, as important, as serious, as awe-inspiring.

If his personification of good had failed, his personification of evil should not fail.

If his audience could not thrill to his heroism, it should tremble at his villainy. That, too, could hold the center of the stage; that, too, could soothe his naked ego.

The body of Tweedledee had been formed by nature for a small part in the world's theater, but the soul of Tweedledee had been formed on a larger scale. In it burned an insatiable fire—a fire that shone through his beady eyes as he sat staring at the floor—a fire that would one day flash out into the world.

Before it nothing could stand. It would burn and destroy. Strong men would tremble before it.

That day was coming fast. Already he could hear its footsteps in the distance. It would touch him on the shoulder; it would look into his eyes, and then—then—

If only the people had been kind on the night of Tweedledee's first appearance in the rôle of hero, if they had cheered him, if they had clapped their hands—why then, how different would be the story that I am telling.

And thus it is with us all. So much depends on our audience.

The grotesque caricature of "The Thinker" moved, moistened his lips with a tongue that resembled a vivid red ribbon, and

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lifted his face slowly from his hand.

Through the open door, a river of blaring music poured in like a cataract. The half-witted Negro seemed carried away in it, and whirled about on his platform, like a chip on a torrent.

Occasionally there came a sudden lull in the music, followed immediately by a sound as though a thousand whips were snapping at once. The big show was drawing to a close.

Tweedledee could see the whole scene as though it were being enacted before his eyes—the people leaning forward excitedly, the volley of deafening applause, the thousands of eager eyes fixed on the dashing chariots, on the stalwart drivers beribboned and bedecked in the pomp of Rome, on the foam-flecked horses. It was a soul-inspiring sight; and for the moment these charioteers were heroes—heroes to the children, to the mothers, to the fathers, to the yokels of the town—heroes snatched from another world.

And yet, he had driven a chariot once—a chariot drawn by dogs. But for the moment he had forgotten, and had thrilled to a strange joy.

That was the last night on which he had played the rôle of hero, and the pain of it had never died away. He had forgotten everything in the wild thrill of his part—a part that he was not supposed to take.

The dogs were no longer dogs, but Arabian steeds; the painted box on wheels, a golden chariot; and he himself an exulant giant. God! How the wind whistled past his face! He listened for the voice of the multitude, and lashed his steeds to greater effort.

And then it came—the voice of the people—it came from a thousand throats, it came in a roar of brutal laughter, laughter that struck him in the face, laughter that beat on his forehead, laughter that closed his eyes in pain.

He was on fire! He struck out again and again with a lash. Fury enveloped his tiny body as though with a red cloak. He became terrible—laughably terrible, like an angry child.

The chariot sped on; the dogs yelped and leaped forward under his lash—and yet, no matter how fast their pace, no matter how he drove, the laughter followed him, caught him up, passed him, and waited—waited at the end of the race—a jibbering, painted clown with a wreath of painful laughter in its hand.

Then he struck out with his lash again and again! The dogs, now frenzied with pain, swerved at last from their path.

There came a thundering crash—and he was lying on the ground. Dirt was in his mouth; darkness settled before his eyes; and yet laughter still echoed in his ears.

Yes, it rang louder now. Thousands of pale faces looked down on him—thousands of pale faces showed their fangs, their cruel white fangs. And it seemed to him, lying there, that all humanity had left these faces, and the link of kindness which holds man to man, had snapped between these animals and himself—that the blacksmith Time could never weld this broken chain.

And with this realization, a certain burden was lifted from his breast; pain stole away, and a strange feeling of relief took its place. He arose, and staggered out of the arena, followed by a shout of laughter.

He was never to return. In that single instant his soul had robed itself for another rôle on the stage of life.

But was this new part easier to play? Could he awe his audience; could he wipe out the grins from the multitude of faces; could he freeze them into masks—masks of horror, each one a painting of his own heart, could he, a pitiful dwarf, do all these things?

No, it was impossible, and yet it must be done. Was it destined that he should fail again? Surely, so it seemed.

OF LATE he had been fostering the evil in him, and banishing the good—giving way to sudden gusts of temper—hating with all the venom of his poisoned soul, yet—and this nearly drove him mad—all his rages, all his curses, all his feeble blows went for nothing, for they brought only laughter—laughter—and nothing but laughter in their wake.

The victim of his rages, his curses, his feeble blows, as like as not would swell the chorus till he felt engulfed in it as in a river—felt it bearing him away to the wild, tempestuous sea of madness. And just as a drowning man struggles against the fierce tide—just as he puts more and more frenzied effort in each frenzied stroke—so now did Tweedledee struggle against this flood of laughter thundering in his brain. "If I only had a commanding body and a commanding voice," he thought. "If I only had a commanding voice—why, I would end it now." And at that very instant a touch fell on his arm.

Tweedledee started and a strange look came into his eyes—the look that a drowning man has when he catches at a straw.

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Two men stood before him—his two friends in the world—the only two who took him seriously. What matter if one were considered mad, and the other little better than a beast, what matter, for were they not his friends?

They never laughed at him. No, they respected him too much for that. They took him very, very seriously as he was. And so Tweedledee's somber little face brightened and he gave each of them a tiny hand.

"Tweedledee," growled the gigantic Hercules, bending down from his seven feet of stature till his lips nearly touched the dwarf's ear, "how's everything with you, Tweedledee?"

Echo—the ventriloquist—said nothing, standing there with his large luminous eyes fixed on the ground; but his thin lips trembled slightly, and the little wooden dummy sitting on his shoulder—the little wooden dummy, with legs like a goat and the head of an old man—spoke.

"It's too hot here," it squeaked. "The fat woman is too fat, the skeleton is too thin. Let us go out into the world together, master."

"And you, Hercules?" cried the dwarf, looking up at the great face hanging over him like a moon, at those dull, sleepy eyes like pools of muddy water, at that huge gaping mouth filled with yellow tusks—"and you, Hercules? Shall we be moving?"

"It is hot," muttered the giant, rubbing a hand like a leg of mutton across his wet face. "Also the flies bite me," he continued with a ponderous, thoughtful shake of his head. "And yet I sleep so much. Where else could I sleep so much as here?"

"In the graveyard," replied the little demon on Echo's shoulder.

"But," continued Hercules slowly and laboriously, "the people come to see me. They like to see me lift heavy weights and bend horseshoes in my hands. If they came here some day and found me gone, they'd be disappointed, they'd—"

"The people," cried Tweedledee in a voice like a rusty hinge, "the people come to laugh at you. You're a machine to them. They put money in the slot, and watch it work. You're not a man, you're a machine—a plodding machine."

"I don't know, Tweedledee," said the giant. "You may be right—you mostly are. But I heard a woman say once—I heard this, mind you, with my own ears—she said to her little boy, 'Don't drink or smoke, and you'll grow up as big as him some day.' It pleased me, that did. It made me feel as though I was an example of what a man should be."

"An example of what a beast should be," broke in the dwarf. "A broken-spirited elephant—that's what you are! You stand there, day after day, in the sun with the people buzzing about you like flies; you stand there quite content if they throw peanuts at you now and then. But Echo and I are made of other clay. We are going out into the world as to a dance. We will take Adventure by the hand and she will lead us. We will fly along like the wind, and, looking back, we will see that which we have passed over has changed somewhat. We are ready for the road, eh, my Echo?"

Echo lifted his beautiful, girlish face; and, in his large, luminous eyes, the light of excitement was flashing brightly.

"Yes, we will go," he said, "and I will take my little friend here." He touched the demon with a caressing hand.

"He will point out our path for us, for he is wise, horribly wise. But listen, and I'll tell you a secret."

He bent down till his lips touched the dwarf's ears.

"He's a thief, and he stole my brain from me. Yes, that's it, that's the reason I have him beside me day and night. I caught him at it, and I've held him ever since. Sometimes he tries to get away, and then I seize him thus." He plucked the little demon off his shoulder with a long, thin hand, and held it suspended in the air. "Now you'll hear him choke. Listen!"

Then the mouth of the little wooden demon opened, and from it came a horrible choking sound, intermingled with inarticulate words and gasping groans.

"Oh! you hear?" said Echo, with his head on one side. "Well, well, it's enough. I must not kill him. What would become of my brain, then? It would be silent; it would no longer tell me what to do. I would be worse off than Hercules, for I haven't his strength. Well, well, Imp"—this to the wooden demon—"go back to my shoulder. I've punished you enough today. But to steal my brains! Oh, you sly one, you sly one! Be good now, and answer when you're spoken to."

"I will, I will, O master," said the little wooden demon in a weak shaky voice. "Just try me, master."

"Very well. Why is a repentant sinner blessed in the eyes of God, Imp?"

"Oh! Oh!" cried the demon with a knowing roll of his head. "I should know that,

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master, I certainly should know that."

"You should. Then answer."

The Imp laid a wooden finger beside his wooden nose, and leered at Tweedledee. "Because he has so much to tell, O master."

"Well answered, my brain. We must go now, for the people are coming. Good-by, Tweedledee."

"Come to my room tonight, Echo," said Tweedledee. "We have our plans to make."

"And sha'n't I come, too?" growled Hercules in sorrow. "Surely my friend isn't angry with me?"

"Yes, angry! Angry!" cried the dwarf. "You're so hard to rouse, so hard to change into a man. But come, I will be glad to see you. Yes, the crowd is gathering. Ah, how I hate them all!"

AS HE finished speaking, people began to drift through the tent door. The circus was over; and, in the distance, the band could be heard playing "Home, Sweet Home."

Tweedledee's two friends hurried off to their respective platforms, and took their accustomed places. The one sat surrounded by heavy weights, sledge-hammers, iron belts; the other by innocent blue-eyed dolls, in whose company the wooden demon appeared more diabolical than ever. He sat leering at their virginal, waxen faces as a satyr might leer in a nunnery; but they, with eyes turned upwards, seemed seeking protection in some supreme, omnipotent being, and never gave their evil companion a single glance.

Tweedledee sat gloomily staring at the gathering crowd, at the men in holiday attire, at the tittering women, at the round-eyed children—yes, at the children, for these he hated most. They were caricatures of himself. These little brainless beasts had bodies like his own.

And because of this he was treated like them, would always be treated like them. To be a man, and yet to be treated like a child—that was terrible indeed.

And they would grow, these children, they would grow and come back some day to laugh at him. But he? Why, he would always stay the same.

Even now he felt that they knew this; he felt that they exulted in their knowledge of the future, in the knowledge that they grew larger year by year, in the knowledge that some day as tall men and women they would come back and laugh, as their fathers and mothers were laughing now.

Yes, he hated them most. Their piping voices, their pointing fingers, their curious eyes—all filled him with a nauseating hatred hard to bear.

At sight of them, he felt tempted to spring forward, to dig his fingernails into their soft flesh, to hurl them to the ground, to stamp them into unrecognizable bloody heaps.

At the very thought, Tweedledee seized the arms of his toy chair with a convulsive grip, and held himself down. It grew warmer in the tent. It was as though these people, this herd of sweating animals, were sucking the precious air through their great gaping mouths, were taking it from Tweedledee, were taking the breath out of his nostrils. His breast rose and fell; he leaned back sick and dizzy, and he felt conscious that his overstrained nerves were giving way.

Now the spieler was herding the people together, was marching them about the sideshow from one freak to another, was pointing out the strange malformations of them all, was holding them up to the ridicule of the mob. He was before the Human Skeleton now, Tweedledee's especial enemy, and, strange to say, the West Indian took a certain pride in his shrunken body, a pride that sometimes nearly drove the dwarf to frenzy. Standing erect, like the lengthy shadow of a man, he returned the smile of the people; then, still smiling, he bowed and sat down. The crowd passed on.

"Here we have Fatima, ladies and gentlemen!" cried the spieler; and that mass of purple, painful flesh lumbered to her feet.

"Fatima, ladies and gentleman, the human pincushion, the fattest woman in the world! Ain't she a fine, big girl? How would you like to call on her some night, and have her sit on your knee?" This to a smiling young man in the front of the crowd.

"You would, eh? But, sh! I mustn't talk like that; the Human Skeleton will hear me. He and she are soulmates. That's the reason they sit here side by side. Look at her blush! Ain't she too cute?"

"Well, step this way, ladies and gentlemen, step this way! Here on your right is Hercules, the gigantic man from the North. Watch him bend those horseshoes in his hands! We captured him while he was wrestling with polar bears on an iceberg in the Baltic Ocean. Watch him break that iron chain across his chest! Here we have the one and only Hercules, ladies and gentlemen, the one and only Hercules!"

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And so it went until the crowd had nearly circled the enclosure, and now stood before Tweedledee's platform.

The dwarf rose slowly to his feet, and stood staring at the white ring of faces. His nerves were on edge. He felt as though his body were a mass of throbbing wires, as though at any moment some strange spring would be set in motion, some spring that on the instant would release these wires and start them trembling and writhing in his brain.

"Here we have Tweedledee, ladies and gentlemen!" began the spieler in his hoarse voice. "Tweedledee, the king of the pygmies. We found him in the wilds of Africa ruling over a large nation of his kind. We had some difficulty in capturing him, ladies and gentlemen, for he's as fierce as a tiger and twice as strong."

Through the laughing of the crowd, came a child's shrill voice. "Oh, lift me up, papa!" it said. "Lift me up, please, I want to see the funny little man!"

A tall man in the crowd reached down and lifted the little boy in his arms till the child's face was nearly on a level with Tweedledee's.

The dwarf glowered at it, and clenched his hands. Surely the spring was giving way at last. All the wires began to tremble at once.

How he hated this thing that was pushed at him; this stupid little beast with sticky hands and dirty face, with staring eyes and drooping lips, this disgusting caricature of himself, who called him the funny little man!

"Oh, papa!" piped the child. "He is funny lookin'. Why, he ain't as big as me! Won't you never grow no more, mister? Why, you ain't fierce as the man said you was! You couldn't hurt nobody, could you, mister?"

Something slipped the spring in Tweedledee's brain, and yet his body worked as smoothly as a machine.

"I'll try," he said grimly.

Barely were the words out of his mouth, before he kicked out with all his force straight into the child's face.

He felt the toe of his shoe sink into something soft, and then with a cry of savage joy, he leaped back. At last he would be taken seriously.

And he was.

For a moment the people, crowded about his platform, were as silent as statues. Even the child was silent till he felt the blood running down his face.

Then he screamed; and, as though this scream brought the others to life, they muttered among themselves and drew back. But not so the father.

Red from anger, he handed the howling boy to his mother, and leaped forward. In an instant he had seized Tweedledee, and was raining a shower of blows on his tiny body—savage blows that quite convinced the dwarf that he was taken seriously.

But through all the pain of them, a strange exultation filled him and he struggled in the other's grasp like a little demon, using hand, foot and teeth in his defense, till suddenly he was rescued—till suddenly two mighty arms bore his assailant away.

Hercules had come to the assistance of his friend.

Tearing through the crowd, as an elephant tears through a garden of shrubs, Hercules had leaped upon the platform, had seized the father of the child, and, with a single effort of his arms, had thrown him out on the floor of white, upturned faces.

And this was not all. Some spring had also slipped in the giant's dull brain.

The plodding beast was a plodding beast no longer, for it had tasted blood. The machine had gone mad.

Hercules in that instant became terrible. His face turned crimson; the veins stood out on his forehead like fat, twisting worms; his teeth grated together; and flecks of foam gathered about the corners of his mouth.

For a moment he stood thus, his great corded fists held high above his head, his bloodshot eyes staring wildly at the crowd before him, and then, with the inarticulate roar of a wild beast, he charged upon them.

Hoarse shouts and shrill screams filled the tent, intermingled with the dull sound of blows falling on bodies. Men, women and children fled before Hercules. They ran from him like rats, and like rats they were trampled down, exterminated.

The dwarf danced about his platform from sheer joy. "Kill them, Hercules!" he screamed. "Kill them all!"

But now other figures appeared on the scene. Strong, silent men—acrobats, athletes, drawn by the shouting.

They sprang on the giant. They seized him about the arms, the legs, the shoulders.

He went down beneath a living mass of man, as a great bear goes down beneath a pack of dogs, only to rise again and shake them off. Bleeding, disheveled, he tossed men about as though they were rag dolls.

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At last a rope was brought and he was entangled in it. Falling to the ground, he was bound fast, and lay full length as harmless as a bundle of fagots.

And then the crowd breathed again. They turned to licking their wounds.

Five senseless forms lay on the trampled grass; and, among the rest, few had escaped unscathed.

Even the Human Skeleton had a badly discolored eye. As he passed the motionless figure on his way out of the tent, he kicked the helpless giant in the ribs.

Tweedledee saw this out of the corner of his eye, and stealing noiselessly away, marked it down on the pages of his memory.

SOME six hours later, Tweedledee sat alone in his little room. The noise of the town had died away. The hurrying footsteps of belated pedestrians no longer echoed on the street; the sluggish trolley cars, buzzing like huge June bugs, had crept into their sheds for a few hours of repose; and it was as though the goddess of the night, the pale resplendent moon, had warned the world to silence with a cloudy finger to her lips.

It was dark in Tweedledee's room. No light brightened it; no fires cheered it; only a single shaft of moonlight, streaming through the open window, fell on the tiny figure, seated in the tiny chair.

It was dark in Tweedledee's soul. No joy brightened it; no heart warmed it; only a single shaft of evil, streaming through his steadfast eyes, found its resting place in the storehouse of his brain.

And so he sat alone with the night; so he sat, not naturally, not easily, but with a certain strained attention, a human spring that, at a sound, a word, a signal, would leap forward to all its murderous length.

And sitting thus, he seemed to listen to the darkness, to the shadows, to his soul, for this sound, this word, this signal, with all the terrible intensity of a gathering storm.

For what was he waiting so patiently, so expectantly, so eagerly? The clock on the mantelpiece seemed to know, for its heart beat *tick tack, tick tack,* fast and furious.

Suddenly the dwarf turned his head with the quick jerk of an automaton, so that his face peered over his right shoulder. At that very moment the quick *tick tack* of the clock stopped, as though it were paralyzed with fright.

Back of his chair, in the broad stream of sunlight, in the very center of his pale river of fire, Tweedledee saw the huge shadow of a man. And, as he watched, it seemed to grow and grow, till, like a hungry giant, it devoured the other shadows in the room.

It grew immense, colossal, terrible. And as Tweedledee trembled, as he cowered before it, suddenly he recognized it, yes, it was at this moment that the ticking of the clock died away.

"Why, it's my shadow!" cried the dwarf. "It's mine, all mine! I am so small," he continued thoughtfully, "but my shadow—why, my shadow covers everything!"

And then again—"It's so big, black and terrible! Surely it will be taken seriously by the world!"

As he sat there lost in thought, he suddenly became conscious of light footfalls sounding on the stairs. They halted on the landing a moment, and then they came *tip tap, tip tap,* up to his door, and again they paused.

"Come in, Echo, come in," piped Tweedledee, in a shrill, penetrating whisper.

The knob turned, the door opened, and another shadow glided into the room.

"I am here, Tweedledee," said a deep, sonorous voice that seemed to come from the fartherest corner. "I am here, Tweedledee," said another voice, a cracked, feeble voice, evidently wafted through the open window. "I am here, Tweedledee," said a third voice, a piping, childlike voice, evidently issuing from the chimney.

"Enough of your tricks, Echo," cried Tweedledee in irritation; "we have more serious things to do."

"Then let us have light," said the tall thin shadow by the door. "I hate the darkness. I'm afraid of the specters that lurk in it. It is their silence that frightens me. If they would only speak, these dark ones. But they will never, never speak. They will only stare and stare! That frightens me—the look in their dull eyes. So I give each a voice, as I see them in the corners, beneath the chairs, behind the curtains. There are hundreds here. Shall I make them speak to you, master? The old ones, the young ones, the babies with their throats all nicely cut like little pigs? Shall I make them squeal? Shall I master?"

"No, no, Echo," said the dwarf, "not now. I'll light the lamp for you— See! They're all gone, Echo, all gone!"

He had risen from his tiny chair, and had lighted the lamp on the table. Now the dull, yellow light revealed the small, untidy room; the baby cot in the recess;

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the little shoes beside it; the writing desk; the bureau; his own miniature form; and, last of all, Echo standing on the threshold; his long, twitching fingers; his dark and brooding eyes; his nervous, trembling lips.

"See! They're gone now, Echo," the dwarf repeated. "Come in, and sit down. Tell me, where is Hercules?"

"He'll soon be here master," said Echo, stepping forward. "Ah! the light is good! It drives them all away. Hercules will be here in a moment, master—good old Hercules! strong old Hercules! brave old Hercules!"

Tweedledee fixed those large, wandering eyes with his sharp, beady ones, as though he were grappling with that wildly whirling intelligence—as though he were binding it with the ropes of his sanity.

"How did he escape, Echo?" he asked slowly. "Steady, now, steady."

Echo's eyes lost their feverish glitter, and became riveted on the dwarf's. Suddenly he began to speak, hesitating between each word, like a child reciting a lesson.

"I did as you told me, master. They left him in the tent, bound. I crept in and cut the ropes. I told him where to come. He should be here now. Listen!"

The dwarf's eyes left Echo's face. He approached the door and listened. Heavy footfalls could be heard sounding on the stairs.

"It's he!" cried Echo. "It's he! Hercules is coming at last!" And, like a child just let out of school, he began to leap about the room, to whirl on his heels with outstretched arms like some kind of a human top.

In a moment more the door was thrown open; the doorway was blocked by a huge figure; a tangled mass of hair was lowered then straightened again; and Hercules stood before them; Hercules, brushing the cobwebs from the ceiling with his yellow locks and making the boards groan under his ponderous feet.

And yet this was not the face of the sleeping giant in the circus tent—this face with battered features and blackened eyes, with bruised forehead and swollen lips—no, this was not the same face at all. It had changed terribly; and yet this transformation was not so much in the face as behind the face; not so much in the discolored eyes as behind the eyes.

Something that had been lying dormant in this man was now awake. The beast was aroused and bristling, for it had tested the joy of its strength.

PERHAPS Tweedledee realized something of this, for, as he spoke, his eyes were sparkling like pieces of jet in the sunshine. "So you came after all, Hercules."

"Yes," answered the giant slowly, "I am ready to go with you now, Tweedledee."

"But the people will miss you," cried the dwarf. "They won't see you breaking the horseshoes any more. They'll be disappointed."

Hercules lifted a huge fist to the level of his eyes. It was swollen, and bruised to the color of an underdone beefsteak.

"Yes, they'll miss me," he said reflectively; "but I want to go with you, Tweedledee. I want something different than I have ever had before. Breaking horseshoes wouldn't suit me any more. There are other things to do—other things. I can't speak my mind, but you know what I mean, Tweedledee?"

"Yes," cried the dwarf excitedly, "I know! I know!"

"And we will go—" said Echo. "We will go out into the world together—Hercules, Tweedledee, and I. What times we shall have together—what times!"

"Sh!" said the dwarf. "Steady, now, Echo, steady. There's one thing we must do before we go. What we owe we must pay. I have sworn it! He who strikes one, strikes all three of us."

"Yes, yes. So it is in the Bible," muttered Echo.

Hercules nodded assent, and clenched his knuckles; his knuckles cracked.

"Well, Tweedledee?"

"Well, Hercules," continued the dwarf, lowering his voice to a whisper, "The Human Skeleton is an enemy of mine. He exasperated me. He likes to irritate me. He—"

"Yes, Tweedledee!" muttered Hercules and Echo in a breath.

"He is also an enemy of yours, Hercules!"

"That bag of bones! How is he an enemy of mine, Tweedledee?"

"You didn't see him, Hercules, but I did," continued Tweedledee in a shrill whisper. "I saw him kick you while you lay tied. He kicked you in the ribs with all his might!"

"Ah!" said the giant in a deep-throated growl, the growl of a dog tugging at his iron chain. "He kicked me, did he?"

And slowly his thick red fingers began to open and shut convulsively, while his eyes narrowed into two slits of steady, glittering light.

"He kicked me, did he? Where does this man live?"

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"Here!" whispered Tweedledee, "in this boarding house—at the end of the passage."

And then, as the giant tiptoed toward the door, crouching from the waist, his huge fists dangling below his knees—as he stepped cautiously forward—the dwarf plucked him by the sleeve.

"Just a moment, Hercules," he pleaded. "I have a plan. It's so ridiculous, so simple! It will make you laugh. But listen to it, and then you can go. And you, too, Echo. Come close, and I will whisper to you."

Then three heads came very close together in this little room—a great, rough-hewn head; a tiny, round head; and an egglike head, running up into a point. For a moment, Tweedledee's voice, low, insistent, like the buzzing of a wasp, could be heard—that, and nothing else. Finally it ceased, and was followed by a chorus of laughter. At last this died away, and Hercules stole out through the open door.

"But my mind is not with me tonight!" cried Echo on a sudden. "That little thief has it, and he's locked up in my box at home. How can I tell what to do? Perhaps he would advise me differently."

"Let me be your mind," murmured Tweedledee. "I will advise you. I am the mind, you are the voice, and Hercules is the body. Surely we shall fare well in the world, for where else can you find such a mind, such a voice, and such a body?

So saying, the dwarf reached up, and seizing Echo's long, slender hand, led him out into the hallway.

"Where else," he repeated, "could you find such a mind, such a voice, and such a body?"

* * *

On the night upon which our story opens, if the reader had been walking down a certain side street in the small town of Milledge at an hour when the dampness in the air proclaims the coming of morning, he might have seen three men approaching through the gloom. And if he had given them a glance—perhaps wondering why, like the other good inhabitants, these were not already in bed—two startling facts might have struck him and awakened his momentary interest.

The most amazing fact would have been the size of the man who walked on the outside of the other two, dwarfing them by comparison.

In the semidarkness he appeared like some gigantic statue that had stepped down from its pedestal for a midnight stroll. And though his height was appalling, his breadth was still more appalling.

It seemed as though the town, the street, the houses, were too small for him—as though this town were a toy town, as though this street were paved with children's blocks—as though these houses were in reality dolls' houses.

As he strode toward you, your impulse would be to stand aside, while your curiosity would whisper, "Follow him!"

Then, when your eyes fell on his two companions, the second fact would strike you. "This town of Milledge is a prohibition town," you would say to yourself, "and yet here is drunkenness staggering on its streets."

And why should you say this? Simply because that figure, supported on either side by the giant and his companion—that loose-jointed form, with dragging feet and drooping head—was evidently the body of a man whose brain had stolen out on a tide of alcohol. "These others are his friends, bringing him home," you would think, and then, perhaps, your interest would die out, and you would hurry on.

But if you followed them—if your curiosity were not swallowed by disgust—if, unnoticed, you dogged their footsteps down the street—at last you would see them enter a tiny hallway, push open a little door, and vanish from view.

And, if you waited patiently for some time, you would see the two sober men reappear and walk off silently arm in arm. Then you would be satisfied. You would realize that you were right; that the helpless man was safe at home; that you could do nothing more than had been done.

And thinking this, you would return to your home; and thinking this, you would go to sleep; and thinking this, you would open your newspaper in the morning; and then, a line, a phrase, a word would strike you—would strike you, as it were, between the eyes. Seizing your head between both hands, you would cry out, "What a fool I am! I was there! I saw it all! God! What a fool I am!"

And you would be wrong, my reader.

It was your common sense, your wisdom, your practicality that blinded you—not your foolishness, your romanticism, your childishness.

Tweedledee was an artist in his way, and simplicity was his hand-maiden. When he dressed crime up as a nun, not one stray lock escaped to catch the eye of a stranger—to arouse imagination—to excite interest.

"When you give the people conun-

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drums," he was won't to say, "you are lost, for then wisdom and curiosity are on your trail; but when you give them commonplaces, the fools only are dangerous. When you commit murder, work in a butcher-shop, and then you won't even have to wash the blood away."

A strange little man was Tweedledee.

THE sunlight, streaming in through the cracked and dusty windowpane, fell full on Tucker's sleeping face. He awoke with one clawlike hand lifted to his eyes.

Groaning, he sat up in bed, and moving his head slowly from side to side, peered at the familiar objects in the room.

Like the clothes-dealer himself, the furnishings of this apartment showed the ravages of time. From the patched counterpane, covering his shrunken body, to the pewter pitcher standing on the mantelpiece, everything seemed to be tottering on the brink of senility.

Dust was everywhere, hiding under the bureau in tiny heaps, lying securely in the shadow of the bed, and covering the threadbare places in the carpet with a thin gray veil.

On the table stood a half-empty bottle of gin. Surrounded by the debris of a past generation, it had a gay, youthful air of pride—it seemed to be saying through its wide-open mouth, "Just look at me."

Tucker moistened his lips with his tongue, and his red-rimmed eyes fixed themselves on the clock which ticked contentedly on the mantelpiece.

Eight!

It was time to be up and stirring. He had been drunk last night, very drunk. How his poor old head ached—just as though tiny steel hammers were beating on his brain.

Yes, he could almost hear the insistent throbbing. Gin was at the bottom of it, that round-bellied smiling bottle of gin.

Did it think that it could keep Matthew Tucker in bed when there was business to be done?

One of the old man's spiderlike legs slid out of bed, and a yellow shriveled foot touched the floor. Soon another joined it; and then both moved rather unsteadily about the room, as the clothes-dealer picked up scattered articles of his raiment. While so engaged, Tucker groaned and grunted.

On one occasion he had recourse to the bottle of gin, holding it up to his mouth with both hands, and drinking so greedily that several drops glistened on his white beard like hail on snow. As a finishing touch to his toilet he ran his fingers through his hair and combed it out with his yellow, ragged nails.

When he entered the kitchen he found his sister cooking breakfast. She hovered over the stove like a bird of prey, her pinched nostrils dilating, her little greedy eyes fixed now on the steaming saucepan, now on the kettle which bubbled wrathfully.

A large black cat, all skin and bones, crouched furtively in one corner. It surveyed the old woman's movements with a commingled look of hope and fear. From time to time, its thin red tongue projected from between two rows of sharp, white teeth.

"Good morning, Anna!" Matthew seated himself and surveyed his sister's back anxiously. Like the cat, he seemed trying to occupy as little space as possible.

Miss Tucker wheeled about, and, holding a spoon in her hand, cried out bitterly, "You've been drinkin' again, Mat!"

"Just a swallow," pleaded Tucker meekly, avoiding her bright eyes. "I was feelin'

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sick, Anna. I had a cold." He passed his hand across his chest with a conciliatory gesture.

"There don't seem to be any heat in my room lately."

Miss Tucker's face drew up into unpleasant knots. She had the appearance of one who suddenly detects a bad odor. "Bah!" she said.

"I don't see the paper," Tucker continued, anxiously seeking a loophole of escape. "Did the boy go and forget it again?"

"I'll see." Miss Tucker turned and walked toward the door. She carried herself with military precision. Her nose was the only part of her that semed consciously to droop.

When his sister had left the room, Tucker's face relaxed.

Benevolent wrinkles creased his jowls. Turning toward the cat, he beckoned to it with a finger as brown as a stick of cinnamon. "Here, pussy, pussy," he called, wriggling his beard reassuringly.

The cat reached his side in two bounds. Rubbing against his leg, purring a hoarse, grating purr, it devoured greedily morsels of the stale bread which Tucker lavishly bestowed upon it.

And he, bending over it like some benevolent deity, mumbled words of endearment through his beard, scratched its arched back, and in other ways showed a marked attachment. For the time being both seemed happy. Their contentment was destined to be short-lived.

The sound of hurrying footsteps could be heard, the door burst open, and Miss Tucker tottered in.

For a moment she stood on the threshold, gasping, her wrinkled throat contracting and expanding from the emotions it contained, her face as white as the belly of a flounder.

Finally she cried out, "Mat, someone's gone and busted our front door in."

"What—what you say, Anna?" Tucker blinked his eyes and regarded his sister with the stupid expression of a man who is groping for his wits. "What you say?" he repeated.

"Fool! will you come and see, then?"

Miss Tucker seized her brother by the wrist and, pulling him from his chair, hustled him out into the hallway. There he found his worst fears realized.

A great splinter had been torn out of the framework of the door, which now stood ajar, its steel catch protruding like the useless tongue of a dead man.

Nothing was to be done here.

"Quick! Quick! To the safe!" cried Tucker.

DARTING into the store, he was soon down on his knees, turning the shining knob to the well remembered numbers. His sister stood over him white-faced and expectant.

Click—click—click.

Ah! Now it was open, and there, safe and sound, lay the snug little piles of banknotes.

"God be praised! We are not robbed—unless some of the clothes are taken!"

He leaped to his feet. He examined the shelves, the hooks, the corners. "No, everything is here," he muttered—"everything is here."

"Maybe you broke the door yourself, Mat," said Miss Tucker, walking to the window.

"I break a valuable lock? Me? Not exactly! But what is that you see in the street, Anna?"

"It's a crowd, Mat, and they're lookin' at our show window. All the school-children have stopped. Why, now they're pointin'!"

Tucker hurried out into the street. The crowd was growing fast. Now it numbered fifty. Men, women, and children pressed their noses against the shop window, jostled each other with their elbows, and pushed forward at all costs to see what was within.

What were they staring at so intently, so eagerly, so expectantly?

Tucker knew what should be there—the wax woman in the second-hand evening dress, with her blond hair and brilliant cheeks; the wax child in the blue and white sailor suit; and lastly, the wax man in the brown ulster with the soft gray hat pulled over his eyes.

He was as familiar with them as with old friends. Often he spoke to them as he dusted the show window in the morning. At other times, he admired them as works of art.

Standing in front, he always marveled at their lifelike appearance. Behind them, of course, were the iron hooks that fitted into little rings of steel on their necks—the iron hooks that made them stand on their waxen feet so naturally—but in front, nothing of the kind was visible.

What were these people in the street saying to one another? If he could only get through and see!

As Matthew Tucker pushed forward a heavy hand fell on his shoulder. "Do you

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own this store?" a stern voice asked. He looked up into a policeman's heavily lined face.

"Yes, yes, I own it all right," he gasped; "have I been robbed? Have they taken my dummies? Have they taken my clothes?"

"Come this way," said the policeman, and without another word he pushed through the crowd with Tucker at his heels. Now they were standing before the show window, and the old clothes-dealer could see everything.

There was the beautiful waxen lady, her cheeks as red as ever, resplendent in the low-cut evening gown; there was the little waxen boy in the sailor suit, holding her by the hand, and there—but no.

My God! this wasn't possible! It was the same coat, the same hat, and yet the figure was different, somehow.

His waxen man stood upright, held its head up, and looked you in the eyes; but this thing that he saw—this listless thing with downcast head and dragging feet—this broken creature, bending at the waist and grinning horribly at the ground—this new and terrifying dummy—he had never seen before.

And as he stared at it, as he stood there motionless, horror stole over him, and breathed her icy breath down into his heart.

God! If it would only stop its grinning! At that moment he felt a dull wonder that the waxen lady did not seize the waxen child in her arms and fly from her grisly companion.

How could she bear that fixed and glassy smile! Ah, what was that trickling down the coat sleeve? What was that creeping down the cloth like some kind of crimson bug? What was that splashing into a little puddle on the floor?

It was blood, that's what it was—falling blood. His waxen man had come to life—had died—and was now bleeding.

And then, as is so often the case, the overstrained mind of Matthew Tucker was mastered by a trifle. One fact loomed up like a black cloud on his mental horizon. The soul of him spoke.

Above the horrified silence of the gathering crowd the voice of the clothes-dealer rang out as clear as a bugle.

"I must take that coat off him!" he cried. "Right away I must take it off! The blood will stain it! It will be good for nothing!"

"I will go with you," said the policeman quietly, "and help you take it off."

The crowd gave way before them and they entered the little store.

Barely were they inside, before the clothes-dealer began to take out the wooden partition that separated them from the show-window. He worked like a man in a dream, with vacant eyes and moving lips. "I must take it off quick," he muttered to himself.

His sister peered white-faced over his shoulder, while the officer helped him with the loose boards. At last the way was clear, and they stepped forward.

There they found it—the body of the human skeleton—that long lizardlike figure hanging from the hook driven in its neck, that bag of bones that dripped its meager lifeblood on the floor, that West Indian who once had grinned at the tiny dwarf as now he grinned at death.

Yes, it was indeed he. But the faces of the people, staring in, were white—ghastly white; and only the waxen lady and the waxen child looked at it and smiled.

"Where were you last night?" asked the officer, fixing Tucker with his eyes. "Where were you when this happened?"

"I was out late last night."

"Where were you?"

"I—I—" stammered Tucker, glancing at his sister.

"Oh, you come along with me," and the policeman laid his hand on Tucker's shoulder.

"Look, look, Mat!" cried Miss Tucker suddenly. "See what's on the button there!" She pointed to the corpse.

The officer approached the dangling body, and, lifting the card that hung on its breast, scrutinized it intently. There, on the tiny piece of pasteboard, in a small but legible hand, was written:

MARKED DOWN
AND HUNG UP
BY TWEEDLEDEE

CHAPTER II

SEARCH FOR A PROFANE PARROT

TOBIAS GRAHAM sat in the library of his house on Riverside Drive. It was a beautiful afternoon in early spring.

Through the half-open window, a breeze, fragrant with the scent of flowers, stole into the room like a child bent on mischief. All morning, it had been playing in the old gentleman's garden—enjoying the respectful salutations of the narcissus which

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bowed golden heads in greeting, plundering the tulips with thieving fingers, and ruffling the arrogant Oriental poppies. And now it circled about restlessly, stirring the curtains, moaning as it found itself caught in the chimney, and then rushing out uproariously to fondle Mr. Graham's trim white beard.

This library was no place for such a gay, trifling wind. Like its master, it was too old-fashioned, too respectable.

It had an arrogant air about it—an air of resenting this informal newcomer—an air of satisfaction which had endured for half a century or more. And its furnishings—the tables, chairs, and portraits—were like thoughts in a commonplace yet well ordered brain.

There was nothing here that was bizarre; nothing to make one say, "How strange! How original! How new!" And it seemed a pity that—while everything outside this window was so young, so hopeful, so green and glowing—here, behind these somber curtains, paralytic old age should be tottering around and around in an unending circle.

Mr. Graham sat in a stiff leather armchair. He had just returned from his customary walk on Fifth Avenue; and his smooth-shaven cheeks were still flushed with the exercise.

He might have been sitting for his portrait, so unnatural was his pose. Occasionally, with an almost studied gesture, he stroked his short, pointed beard.

Suddenly the sound of light footsteps could be heard in the hallway; the door swung open, and a young man entered. "Well, I'm here, Uncle Toby," he said, advancing.

Mr. Graham, before speaking, looked at his nephew attentively. Like the noisy, frivolous April wind, Hector McDonald invariably had a disconcerting effect on the old gentleman. Those bright hazel eyes, that clear-cut smiling face, lacked reverence for age, lacked moral responsibility, lacked conventional standards—or so at least he thought.

Even his nephew's fashionably cut tweeds and highly polished boots were an offense to the old gentleman's sensibilities. They conjured, to his mind, a flippant tendency to neglect the serious affairs of life.

He saw in this young man a butterfly with outstretched wings. And, with the inconsistency of age judging youth, peering out through the barred window of time, light laughter and ready smiles were to him unpardonable.

"You wanted to see me, sir?" asked McDonald.

"Yes," said Mr. Graham, pursing his lips and then drawing them into two straight lines. "I think the time has come when you should have reached a decision. Six months ago, I suggested that you enter Arlington's office. Then, you seemed determined on another course of action—a course of action directly opposed to my wishes and judgment. Well?"

McDonald flushed.

His uncle's tone was so icy, those gray eyes were so cold and unfeeling, that figure sitting in the armchair was so stiff and unapproachable, that he felt any plea for his own viewpoint would be absolutely lost and thrown away.

One might as well argue with an iceberg. "I can only say now what I said then," he answered.

"And you still wish to write for a living?"

"Yes."

Mr. Graham's beard trembled slightly. "And you know what I think about your ambition?"

"Yes."

"Very well." The old gentleman rose to his feet and bowed stiffly. "I wish you a very good afternoon," he said.

"Oh, I say, Uncle Toby!" cried McDonald in surprise. "What are you doing? Turning me out?"

"Such an inference does your imagination credit," said the old man grimly. "I don't intend to be a crutch for decrepit genius. Follow my wishes, and you may remain; disobey my commands, and you shall go. You are no longer a child. You are of age and should be self-supporting. When your mother died, I had you educated to the best of my ability. I tried to make a man of you. If I have failed—well—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"But don't you think you're hard on me, Uncle Toby?" asked the young man with a smile that was half a grimace of dismay. "We all have our idiosyncrasies. I am an artist; so why make a businessman out of me? You have a love for the beautiful yourself, Uncle Toby, if you'd only let it grow. You bottle up all your emotions till they turn sour. Now there's that collection of rubies you have—the best in the country, I've been told. Surely they show that you have some latent spark of poetic fire. You don't love them just because they're worth a lot of money, do you?"

"Good afternoon, sir," said his uncle sternly.

"Of course," the young man continued,

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"rubies are only rubies after all. At the best they are cold, crystallized thoughts. And they are dangerous to have about. They might make a criminal of one. They might make a thief of you, Uncle Toby."

"Good afternoon, sir."

"But, Uncle Toby, you don't get my meaning!"

What a stick his uncle was, so formal and stiff in every gesture, so much like a dressed up poker, so absolutely devoid of all nonsense that McDonald often felt like rumpling the old gentleman's hair.

"No, you don't get my meaning," he repeated. "I was not speaking at random when I said you might rob someone. And what a theft that would be! You'd not rob them of mere money, you'd rob them of a priceless possession—something that you would never be able to give back again. You would rob them of their honesty by the temptation of those rubies. Some day I will reverse the order of things—some day the pickpocket will not be tried for stealing a wealthy man's purse; no, but a wealthy man will be tried for exposing the pickpocket to temptation. What do you think of that, Uncle Toby?"

"Good afternoon," said Mr. Graham in a louder tone than he had used hitherto.

McDonald laughed, and then suddenly stopped. The muscles about his firm-set jaw twitched slightly.

"All right," he said, "I'm off. You're impossible to get along with, Uncle Toby. You're not a man, you're a sign-post on the road of respectability. And don't think for a minute that I'm coming back here in a few days to eat out of your hand. If you do, you are greatly mistaken. Win or lose, I'm through, Uncle Toby. I'll send for my things tomorrow."

"Good afternoon," said Mr. Graham once again.

"Good afternoon!" cried McDonald hotly. He strode to the door and, throwing it open, slammed it behind him. Soon the sound of his footsteps died away.

WHEN Hector McDonald left his uncle's house, the sun was still high in the heavens. Two streams of automobiles flowed past in opposite directions.

The wealth of New York was taking advantage of the fine weather to display itself. The air was resonant with the hum of well-oiled machinery, the footsteps of loitering pedestrians, the shrill voices of children.

One caught sight of old men, in frock-coats and high silk hats, walking briskly and swinging their canes with a jaunty mien. Nursemaids and baby carriages were everywhere. And above it all, a spotless sky smiled down on the city.

The young man's anger soon melted away. On such an afternoon it was well nigh impossible to harbor malice for long.

Uncle Tobias, like other shadows, vanished in this glorious spring sunshine. At twenty-three, one is a mirror reflecting only momentarily the clouds that pass.

Hector McDonald, up to this, had not come into violent contact with the world. During all his twenty-three years he had never found himself in want of any material luxury. At school, at college, his uncle had given him a liberal allowance which he had spent generously. He knew nothing of poverty—it had never come into his calculations. And now it seemed a very tiny speck, afar off on a limitless background. He had two hundred dollars in his pocket—the remainder of his month's allowance—and quite sufficient for his wants until he should be able to make more.

And there was no doubt in Hector McDonald's mind that he should make more—a great deal more.

Fresh from college where he had been editor of the "Year-Book," president of the Literary Society, and prominent contributor to "The Collegian," was it any wonder that the young man's mental horizon was limited? The four walls of his alma mater had, until lately, encompassed his world; and their benign shadows still rested on him.

Had not Professor Snow taken him aside on one memorable occasion and said, "McDonald, you have a future." He had written books on literature and he knew.

And after he had had such encouragement, after he had sat up night after night writing short stories that were to astonish the world, after he had taken all his friends into his confidence, Uncle Tobias had curtly told him that he must go into Mr. Arlington's office. What an absurdity that was! He could imagine himself sitting in that ogre's den, that ogre who disliked him heartily—sitting there and writing figures in a ledger, servile, obedient, running about at anyone's beck and call. Such a life, for a man of gifts and spirit, was unendurable.

If his mother had lived, she would never have consented to see him become a slave. No, she would have understood him, she would have encouraged him, she would have told her brother not to interfere. He remembered her as a tall, authoritative

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lady—a lady who had sometimes ordered other people about, but who had never ordered him. Even Uncle Tobias had been a little in awe of her. He recollected that on one occasion, when he was quite a small boy, he had used the old gentleman's hat as a football with perfect impunity. Hector smiled at the remembrance and strode on.

And then there was Dorothy Arlington.

For a year, they had been unobtrusively engaged. He had told her all his hopes, all his ambitions. And she believed in him. She was confident that he would be a great man one day.

What would she think of him if he knuckled under, if he gave up all claim to an individuality of his own—if he entered her father's office? Surely she would lose faith in him. He would sink in her estimation to the level of the average young man—the young man whom she met at dances and entertainments—the young man who talked business, bridge, horses, dogs, and nothing else. No, he would write; and his uncle should not force him to renounce his ambitions.

McDonald came to a sudden determination. He would go to Dorothy and tell her everything. He felt sure that she would applaud his decision. He drew out his watch and looked at it. It was just four. Mr. Arlington would not be home from the office yet—that was a satisfaction. There was an open hostility existing between them, which made chance meetings rather strained.

He realized perfectly that the financier considered him a butterfly, and, with natural perversity, did all in his power to further this belief. Yes, he would go and see her now.

By this time he was nearing Fifth Avenue. Walking down a side street, he passed a small bird store. In the window were at least a dozen cages—each inhabited by a large green parrot. They gazed out through the bars with solemn yellow eyes. Gloomy captives, with ruffled plumage and despondent, drooping wings, they silently implored the passer-by to pity them; to loose the purse-strings and take them out into the world.

At another time, the young man would have stopped to look at them, for, like a child, he was invariably fascinated by bird stores; but today he could see the Arlington house in the distance; so he hurried on.

And yet, although he had passed it by so unceremoniously, it was to be visualized again and again on his thoughts; to recur in the strange events which were to follow, like the motif in some weird musical mélange. McDonald was to see many bird stores in the years to come, but never without an involuntary shudder.

HECTOR McDONALD sat in the living room of the Arlington house, awaiting the appearance of his hostess. The air was fragrant with the scent of Easter lillies, which bowed their pure, pale faces in the window. All about him were the rich furnishings that great wealth, directed by excellent taste, can alone command.

A Persian rug stretched beneath his feet, as soft and yielding to the touch as swansdown. On the wall hung several prints of the past Arlingtons—women with powdered hair, holding bright fans with their slender tapering fingers; men of florid complexions and prominent chins, wearing swords, wigs, and epaulets. The chairs and tables, like these portraits, dated back to the colonial days. Black with age, they added a certain severity to the apartment, quite in keeping with its master.

Suddenly the heavy portieres divided, and Miss Arlington entered. She was a tall, dark girl of nineteen—a girl who would have been strikingly handsome were it not for a rather prominent chin which she had inherited from her father. There was a pleasing frankness in her direct glance, a careless masculinity of stride which suggested the grown up tomboy. Young men called her a "good fellow," and sought her out as a partner in tennis or golf. Only McDonald had discovered that she was at all artistic.

"Hello, Hector," she greeted him.

McDonald rose, and clasped her outstretched hand. "I've got something very serious to tell you, Dorothy. Uncle Tobias has cut me off with a shilling."

"What!" Miss Arlington seated herself, and regarded the young man with a look of mingled astonishment and alarm. "What do you mean, Hector?"

"Simply what I say—he's turned me out."

"But what reason could he possibly have? You haven't changed in any way during the last three months."

"No, I haven't, and that's the reason he has turned me out," said the young man bitterly. "Four months ago he told me he had a position for me in your father's office. I naturally refused it, intending to write. He gave me time to think it over, saying that if I didn't knuckle under he'd cut off my allowance. I thought he was bluffing then. Well, this afternoon he called

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"I hate the darkness. I hate the specters that lurk in it. They will never speak. They will only stare and stare."

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me into his library and asked me what I had decided to do. What could I say, Dorothy?"

Miss Arlington hesitated a moment before replying. Frowning, and tapping the floor with her foot, she seemed to be plunged in thought. Finally she lifted her frank blue eyes to his face. "There was only one thing to tell him, Hector—the truth."

"So I did," said the young man moodily, "but honesty doesn't seem to have any effect on Uncle Toby—he is as impervious to it as an icicle. It's impossible to thaw him, Dorothy."

"Perhaps you didn't take the right way with him," the girl suggested. "Old people demand deference from their young relatives. If they don't get it, they generally kick up a row. Take father, for instance, sometimes he's like a cat—you've got to stroke him just so. That's the reason he doesn't like you, Hector—you're too flippant with him. Because you don't respect his white hairs, he calls you the 'Musical comedy Man.'"

McDonald smiled. "Does he? Why I never thought he had enough imagination to invent a nickname. Well, anyhow, Uncle Tobias and I have split up."

"What did you say to him?"

"Oh, I told him that I didn't intend going into your father's office. Then he grew so ridiculous, so frigid, so inhuman, that I couldn't resist chaffing him a bit about his rubies. And all the time he sat there with a face as blank of expression as a tombstone, mumbling, 'Good afternoon, good afternoon, good afternoon,' till it got on my nerves and I bolted."

"And won't he take you back again?"

"But I don't want to go back!" cried the young man. "I'm going to write and make my own living in the world. Don't you understand, Dorothy?"

"Of course I know you will, but father won't. He'll make us postpone our wedding until I'm of age—nearly two years from now."

McDonald's face became overcast, gloomy. "Yes, I guess you're right," he said slowly—"unless I make good very soon. Still, there's money to be made in short stories, and I've written twelve in the last three months. You see, I'm getting businesslike and practical, Dorothy."

"Have you sent any of them to the magazines yet?"

"No, but I intend to."

"What kind of stories are they, Hector?"

"Mystery and murder, mostly. I've got talent that way. I think I was born a natural detective.

ONLY last night as I was walking along Riverside Drive, I saw a murderous-looking little man stealing on before me in the gloom. There was something about him that made me shudder and yet tingle all over—the same kind of feeling the hound must have when he catches sight of the fox.

"Well, I followed him, and sure enough when he came to Uncle Toby's house, he darted down into the basement. 'Ah!' I said to myself, 'here's where I catch a criminal red-handed,' so I followed him and laid my hand on his shoulder, just as he was pushing something through the door."

"Oh, what was it, Hector?" cried Dorothy breathlessly, "an infernal machine? Was he a murderer?"

"No, Dorothy," said Hector, "what he pushed through the door was only a bottle of milk; the man turned out to be the milkman. Yet, for all that, my suspicions of his guilt were well founded when I had my coffee at breakfast. You can imagine how violent my sensations would be if I encountered a murderer, when a milkman could affect me so. It's kind of a gift, I suppose."

"You're absurd, Hector! But I'd like to read one of your stories."

"You wouldn't sleep for a week if you did. Just think, if we were married, you could help me write them."

"If we were married," repeated Dorothy thoughtfully, "that would be happiness. If we only had money enough we could have—"

But just at this moment, childish, tottering footsteps were heard in the hallway, and a little red-cheeked boy of three or four years stumbled over the threshold into Dorothy's arms.

"A prophecy!" murmured McDonald; and Miss Arnold flushed, looked embarrassed, and bit her lip.

"Oh, Aunt Dorothy," piped the child, "mother says I can have a parrot like I saw in the window—a green parrot with red on its wings. She said they talk most as plain as me."

"And where are you going to get this wonderful bird, Tommy?"

"Don't know, but tomorrow mother and I are going to look."

"Come here, Tommy," said Hector. "You know me, don't you?"

"Yes," answered the child, "I know you.

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You're the man Aunt Dorothy told me to call 'Uncle Hector!'"

"Right you are, my son. Now you want to get a real live parrot, don't you? Well, I'll go to Africa tonight, and if I have any luck I ought to find one perching on the branch of a palm. I'll grab him by the tail feathers, shake him until he is wide awake, and then find out whether he can talk or merely squawk. If he talks like a gentleman, I will realize that I have got the wrong bird; but if he swears, I'll know that he's the one you want, and I'll bring him back to you."

"What will mother say when he swears?"

"A parrot is a privileged person," explained Hector gravely. "The more he swears, why, the better he's liked. Curses fall from his lips like drops of honey, and the wickeder he is, like the money kings, the more he's worth. But in the darkest depths of the jungle I will discourse with the feathery inmates, and the one whose masterly command of billingsgate brings the blush of innocence to my cheek, I will carry back to you, my little friend."

"I like you, Uncle Hector!" cried the child, stretching out his arms to the young man. "Don't forget, bring the wickedest!"

An hour later Hector McDonald, after a fond farewell to the youthful aunt and blissful nephew, sallied out into the early falling twilight. The resounding footsteps of the hurrying pedestrians, the tooting of automobile horns; the jangling of trolley cars; the muttering of the great city—all fell on the young man's ears unheeded, for he was living in those earlier, enchanted moments of love, when imaginative youth is enveloped in the canopy of fancy, and all other things are as shadows. Perhaps the most acute sensation in an affair of the heart is that ego-feeding germ which springs to life—that ego-feeding germ which makes heroes of us all, turning the dull feet of fact into the land of romance and guiding the lagging footsteps into brilliant, unknown paths.

Hector McDonald was living on that exalted pinnacle of life. As he walked along the darkening street, the memory of grim Uncle Toby was obliterated, all his annoyances were forgotten, and in their place, before his mental vision, was pictured the scene that he had just left; Dorothy Arlington sitting with the firelight on her hair, her chubby nephew beside her. At that moment his youth and immaturity fell from him like a garment, and he felt almost like a father to the child.

Youth and age are the loneliest periods of life, when one looks either forward or backward to a state of companionship that loses nothing of enchantment by the distance of the years.

As he hurried on, dreaming of the future, memory suddenly touched him with her lash, and he awoke to reality. "By Jove!" he thought, "I'd forgotten all about the parrot! Where was it I saw that bird store, now? Oh, yes, I remember now. It was just a short distance down this side street—I'll step in and have a look around."

HECTOR McDONALD invariably looked through the windows of a store before he entered, like a general reconnoitering; and so now, true to his custom, he tried to peer through the dusty pane, but could make out little except that there was a light burning within, against which the ruffled forms of sleeping parrots stood out in gloomy silhouettes. Although he pressed his nose to the glass like a child of ten, he could make out nothing more. He turned the handle of the door and entered.

For a moment he stood on the threshold, blinking the blackness of the night out of his eyes, and glancing cautiously about him.

The room was small, and filled with all sorts of cages and boxes. Before the window, hung the line of parrots, now blinking their fierce yellow eyes, and stretching themselves lazily. Farther back was a multitude of canaries; while one coal black raven, somber, austere, sat sedately on his perch, ruling all the others in his sable robes of majesty.

This bird stared haughtily at Hector as though saying, "And who are you?"

On the floor were boxes, large and small, from which came a never-ending chorus of grunts and squeaks.

Besides these birds and animals, there was not another inmate of the room, neither man, woman, nor child; and Hector, the cynosure of all these bright eyes, felt unaccountably ill at ease. He began to fidget with his hat, and moved his feet about restlessly.

He coughed loudly, hoping to attract some human being to the place.

He remembered having heard a story, when a child, about a hunter who dreamed that he was being judged by all the animals he had slain, and he knew that he now must be feeling very much as that hunter had felt. His vivid imagination instantly conjured up the court-room scene. The raven was the judge and the parrots

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were the jury. He could almost see a pair of spectacles on the raven's black beak, almost see the parrots turning to corpulent, nodding jurors before his eyes.

All at once the sudden opening of a door on the other side of the room, brought him out of his trance. He started, and looked up to see a very beautiful old lady approaching.

He first thought she was old because of her snowy white hair, but, as she drew nearer, he realized that he must be mistaken. Those plump, pink cheeks were unwrinkled; those large luminous eyes, now peering at him so kindly, were still full of the fire of life. It was as though Father Time had only kissed her hair in passing.

"What can I do for you, sir?" she asked in a peculiarly musical voice, and, with a nervous gesture, placed one hand over her lips.

"I want to see some of your parrots," began Hector. "I'd like to hear them talk. I was thinking of buying—"

But before he could finish, a deep guttural voice drowned him out. "I don't like that young man," it said slowly and distinctly, "I don't like that young man."

Hector McDonald wheeled about as though he were on springs. So lifelike was the tone, so clear the enunciation, that he thought someone must have entered. But there was no one there; and he found himself staring stupidly through the gilded bars of a cage into the fierce, yellow eyes of a parrot.

But hardly had he turned, hardly had he realized his mistake, before another voice, a shrill female voice, cried out, "His teeth are shiny; his eyes are shiny; and they've taken all the light from his soul."

Again Hector turned in astonishment, and again his eyes encountered the fixed gaze of another parrot.

But before he realized this, before he could steady his reeling brain, a third voice broke the stillness, the thin quavering voice of age. "I am old," it said fretfully, "very old. I have tasted blood; I have seen death; and he who steals my sleep away from me, is cursed in the eyes of God."

This time Hector saw the bird that spoke, and, as it were, caught it in the act of speaking. It was very dingy looking, this parrot, and it bit at its bars wrathfully, and peered at the young man through half-closed eyes.

"Do not judge him too hastily, my brothers," cried a commanding voice that made him whirl about on his heels. "He is young," continued the voice, "and the hot blood of youth shall be forgiven."

"Amen," said a childish voice in a corner.

"Judge not lest ye be judged," said the raven, for it was he who had spoken like an oracle; and ruffling his plumage slightly, with a haughty tilt to his beak, he turned about on his perch, presenting his broad, black back to the company.

Then there followed a disconcerting silence.

Hector McDonald felt that his brain was revolving like some kind of huge pinwheel. He seized his head with both hands, as if he were trying to hold it stationary on his shoulders; while between dry lips he gasped out, more to himself than to the old lady, "This isn't possible, you know, this really isn't possible."

"Oh, yes, it is, sir," she said, evidently enjoying his amazement and smiling at him in a motherly fashion. "Yes, it is. Don't mind them. They're my birds, sir, my darling birds."

"Birds!" cried Hector, indicating the cages by a wave of his hand. "Birds! They may be devils but they're not birds."

"Oh, but they are, sir," cried the old lady. "And such well-taught birds you won't find in the whole city. They're mostly old ones; and what knowledge they do have stored away in their heads! It's quite remarkable."

"Yes, remarkable is the word," said the young man, still unconvinced, and giving the row of cages a suspicious look. "But will you tell me how they carry on a conversation like that?"

"That comes from years and years of teachin'," said the old lady, "Some of these birds are awful old. My father owned all those that spoke just now. He taught them to go on like that when anybody came into the store, and he never sold any of them. He kept them to cause a sensation, as he said."

"And he succeeded," said Hector, beginning to regain his self-composure. "But how did he get them to speak one after the other like that?"

"Oh, it took years and years. They do it by sequence of sound, sir. You see one starts, and the next one knows by the sound when his time had come around. But it took an awful time, sir."

"I can believe it. I never heard anything like it before. I wouldn't think it possible if I hadn't heard it with my own ears. Of course you won't sell these birds, but have you any others that can talk well? I want to buy one for a little boy I know."

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"Oh, yes," said the old lady, smiling delightedly, "I can make every parrot in the place talk to you. They're all proficient talkers, sir."

"Then will you please show me a few examples?"

"Well," said the old lady thoughtfully, "there are two birds that I recommend specially. One I call the 'Philosopher' and the other the 'Pirate.' You shall hear them both, and choose."

"Fine!" cried Hector, enthusiastically, "fine! Let's hear the Philosopher first. Perhaps he's a feathered Schopenhauer."

"I don't know him," replied the old lady, "but this bird is very old and very wise. He knew almost as much fifty years ago, when father bought him. But you'll be able to judge for yourself. He's over here, sir. Come this way."

HECTOR McDONALD followed the old lady into a corner of the little store, a corner veiled by the shadow of several packing boxes; and here, shrouded as it were in mystery, hung a rusty old cage, gray with dust and cobwebs. By straining his eyes to the utmost, the young man could just make out through the bars of the dungeon the large solemn eyes and black projecting beak of the prisoner within.

"He does look like a philosophic old bird," said Hector. "Why is he shut off from the world by these packing-boxes? Does he like to be as solitary as this?"

"Like it?" cried the old lady, "like it? Why he just dotes on it. I used to think like you, that maybe he was lonely here; and I moved him over with the others. Well, you ought to have heard the noises he made. How he cursed and swore at them! It was awful! All day long and all night long he was at it. The Pirate is rough and ready with his tongue, but he can't say near the mean and spiteful things this old bird can—things that you cut like a knife."

"I suppose he hurt their feelings?"

"Now you're joking," said the old lady, giving him a quick look. "But you're wrong there, sir, because parrots do have feelings. I live with them, and I should know."

Evidently this old woman was a little mad, thought Hector. It would be better to humor her a bit. "Why do you keep this cage so dirty?" he asked. "The rest are clean enough."

"He can't stand having his cage dusted. He likes it covered with cobwebs most. If ever I come near him with a duster he carries on like a bad one. I guess the dirt and cobwebs fit in with his thinking, somehow. He's a gloomy old bird."

"Well, let's hear him talk," said Hector, burning with curiosity.

The old lady put her band in the pocket of her gingham apron and brought it out filled with sunflower seeds. These she pushed, one by one, through the bars as an offering to the philosopher within. "Hush!" she whispered, with a finger to her lips, "you'll hear him speak directly."

Listening with strained attention, Hector heard a crackling noise, evidently a sunflower seed being crushed between rapacious jaws, and then a voice, deep, hollow, awe-inspiring, issued from the gloomy recesses of the cage.

"I am old, sad and weary," said the voice. "Knowledge I have, and I curse it because it makes me sad. Every new thought is a thorn in my crown. The fools fly about in the sunshine rejoicing, because they are fools. Wisdom is the dregs at the bottom of the cup; folly the happy foam crowning the glass.

"This foam is composed of bubbles—love, ambition, hope. Soon it fades away. Love is selfish; ambition, famishing ego; and hope, a will-o'-the wisp.

"I knew that, years ago. Some do not taste the dregs of wisdom, they die praising God. He is the great egotist, He made all mankind in His image. If He had had six arms and six legs, you might be able to accomplish more. The worms are our fondest friends, they remain with us even after we are penniless and cold to them. I have thought a lot in my day, but now I must sleep." The solemn voice died away.

Then for the second time that evening, McDonald was struck dumb with amazement; for the second time that evening, he experienced the cold fear of a person on the verge of insanity, the fear that he could no longer trust his faculties.

Surely it was impossible that parrots could talk as these parrots had talked. If anyone had told him so he would have laughed at that person, and yet, here he was, face to face with the evident fact.

All at once he grew hot with anger; anger that a brave man experiences in encountering something supernatural, something beyond the scope of human intelligence.

These were not parrots, but other things dressed up to look like parrots, such was his extremely hazy thought; and, with the desperation of a doomed soul, he stuck his finger through the bars of the cage and prodded the gloomy captive in the breast.

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There came a loud flapping of wings, a guttural scream, and something hard and sharp bit his finger to the bone.

McDonald drew back his hand with a muttered curse and regarded with calmness the blood dripping from it. His mental equilibrium had returned. "It's a parrot," he said in a relieved voice. "There's no dodging the fact that it's a parrot."

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" cried the old lady, "so sorry! All the beautiful blood is flowing out, and dropping to the floor like rubies. They will be lost, all lost. Come with me quickly; I'll tie it for you." She took the young man by the arm.

Hector McDonald followed this strange old woman through the open door at the rear of the shop, followed her dazedly, as a little child follows its mother, with his wounded finger in his mouth.

She conducted him to a tiny room in back of the store, a tiny room, with bare white walls and a hardwood floor that reflected the ruddy light from the open fireplace.

In one corner, beside the window, was a wicker baby-carriage; and in it a little sleeping form could be seen outlined through its covering. The whole place was homelike, from the rocking chair and sofa to the grandfather clock harmoniously ticking out the seconds.

The old lady lead Hector to a washbasin near the baby carriage. Soon she had his wounded finger beneath the faucet, and in a moment more was bandaging it neatly with a piece of snowy linen she had taken from her workbox on the table.

"How does it feel?" she asked at length, with anxious solicitude mirrored on her face. "I hope it doesn't pain you, sir?"

"Oh, it's nothing," said Hector, coming out of his mental stupor, "nothing at all. I'm sorry to have put you to this bother, though;" and then wishing to please this kind old lady: "Is this your baby, Mrs.—?"

"Blake's the name, sir," she answered with an imperceptible start and sidelong look at the baby carriage, "Mrs. Irene Blake. Yes, I suppose it's mine now since its poor mother died, my sister who was."

"It's a beautiful baby," said Hector without the slightest idea whether he were stating a fact or not, for at that moment the child's face was buried beneath the bedclothes, "quite a remarkably fine baby."

"Yes, it is pretty," said the old lady, flushing with pleasure. "But if you're ready, sir, we'll go back and I'll show you the Pirate."

"Is he as bloodthirsty as the Philosopher?" asked Hector, as he followed her into the shop. "You know I want a parrot for a little boy."

"Oh, he's as gentle as a lamb," said the old lady over her shoulder, "only his talk isn't. He's bloodthirsty with his tongue, that's all. His bark is worse than his bite."

"I was hoping he didn't have a bite," said McDonald, glancing ruefully at his bound finger.

"Of course you don't want to prod him, parrots don't like that. It goes against their pride, and they're the proudest birds that fly."

"I'll be careful not to," said the young man.

By now they were standing before another cage, which like the Philosopher's, was hung a little apart from the others.

HECTOR, at a glance, realized that its inmate had a far different temperament from the feathered Schopenhauer's. Evidently this bird was more for action and less for thought. McDonald could see it moving quickly from one end of its perch to the other; pecking at the bars with its beak; climbing up and down; turning awkward somersaults; and in all ways showing a restless energy quite foreign to the gloomy bird behind the packing boxes.

Even as it spoke, the Pirate continued its violent revolutions, speaking either right side up or upside down as the case might be, which was disconcerting, to say the least.

"You musn't mind him," said the old lady. "He can't keep still a minute. I believe he even walks in his sleep, which means a bad conscience but he can't help it, poor thing. Now Pirate, let's hear your story," and again she whispered "Ssh!" and put her finger to her lips.

Then, to Hector's amazement, the Pirate, in a quavering seafaring voice, launched out into singsong verse.

"It was when I sailed with Bloody Mike
On the Caribbean Sea,
The night I seen, with groan and scream,
Blood washing to yer knee;

The merchantman we laid aboard,
Puttin' the crew beneath the sword
And callin' on the name of Gawd —
Won't never wash us clean.

Ahoy! Ahoy! Bully, boy!
There's a vessel on our lee;
Devils in hell! see how her swell
Shakes across the sea.
So up with yer dirk betwixt yer teeth,

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And throw away the old black sheath—
For there's gold in her hold, for the bold,
Bully boy!"

"How's that?" cried the old lady, when the Pirate had finished. "Real poetry like you read out of a book. And that isn't all he knows. Listen to this: How do you like it here, Pirate?"

"Hell," said the parrot, turning a back somersault. "Hell! Give us a mug o' grog!"

"They tell me you're not as wicked as you used to be, Pirate?" said the old lady.

"Me?" cried the bird, biting savagely at his perch. "Me? Why damn their eyes, I'm wickeder than I ever was!"

"That's enough," cried Hector, whose brain was beginning to revolve again, "that's quite enough. I don't want to hear the story of his life. Just a few amusing anecdotes are quite sufficient. When he meets Tommy he can be more communicative. What do you want for this bird, Mrs. Blake?"

"Well," said the old lady thoughtfully, "let me see. Of course the Pirate is an accomplished bird, but still he's a disturbing influence in the store, he gives the young parrots bad ideas. I tell you what, I'll let you have him for fifty dollars."

"Done!" cried Hector, delighted at securing a monster of wickedness for such a small sum. "I'll take him, Mrs. Blake." Pulling out his pocket-book, with the unwordliness characteristic of him, he drew from its very much depleted contents a fifty-dollar bill and presented it to the old lady.

She hesitated a moment before putting it in her pocket.

"There's just one thing more," she said, "I always like to know where my parrots are going, what kind of a home they are going to get. The Pirate is an old friend of mine, even if he is a trifle coarse at times, and I still wish him well in life."

"He's going to Mr. Arlington's house on Fifth Avenue, I'm giving this bird to his grandson, Tommy. I wish you'd send it in the morning."

"Oh, he's going to Mr. Arlington's, is he?" said the old lady thoughtfully. "I'm afraid the Pirate will be tempted by all that wealth around him. Well, I'll send him over tomorrow morning by cousin Harry. Will you write the address on this card, please?"

As Hector bent over the counter with a pencil in his hand, a childish cry of lament came through the half-open door of the room behind the store. "It's the baby crying," said the old lady, starting nervously. "I must go and see what he wants. Excuse me just a moment, sir," and she hurried out.

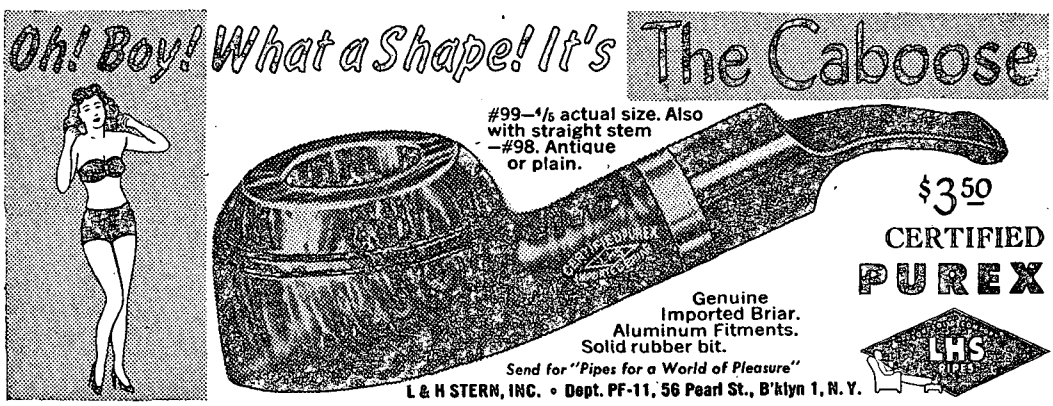
When she returned Hector handed the card to her and started to leave with a last look about him at the room where he had experienced such strange sensations. "I never thought to see parrots so well trained as yours, Mrs. Blake," he said, turning at the doorway.

"I'm so glad you're pleased with them," said the old lady, smiling at him in her motherly fashion. "Do drop in again. If you're interested, I can show you many other strange birds. Besides, I'd like to have you see the baby when he's awake, will you?"

"I certainly will," said Hector with conviction. "I don't remember when I've passed such an exciting hour. You may expect me soon, Mrs. Blake."

As Hector hurried home on that never-to-be-forgotten evening, bright anticipation of the joy on Tommy's face and the horror on his mother's, when the piratical parrot should appear, filled his heart with gladness.

Never once did he realize that this gift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had placed him many days nearer to the bread-line. It was this young man's unworldly custom never to think of the necessities of life.

"What a wise old chap Shakespeare was," he muttered, looking up at the moon which was at that moment peering over the ragged rooftops. "What a wise old chap he was when he wrote: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, O Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy!' Yes, there's a lot of truth in that."

With what surety of conviction would Hector have said this if, by any chance, like the moon at that moment, he could have looked into the little back room of the bird store—that neat little room with the bare white walls and polished floor, reflecting the calm firelight in a pale yellow pool at the beautiful old lady's feet.

HAVING finished his breakfast, Mr. Arlington took up the morning paper. He went into ambush behind it, only darting out from time to time to catch some unlucky member of his household in a natural word or gesture and to quell them with a stony stare. When he was about, his thin anemic wife and widowed, elder daughter were as wax dolls; only Dorothy now and then asserted herself.

And because of this, the younger girl was the idol of the old man's heart. He loved to bully her to the point where she would flare up into a righteous anger—the point beyond which even he dared not go.

The others were spiritless. He had quelled them so easily because they had never had the true Arlington blood in them, the fighting blood that had placed him where he was.

He knew that Dorothy had inherited it all, all the fiery strength that had pulsed in his grandfather, in his father, and in himself, the strength that had made that name a powerful one in the city. And after he had had a scene with his younger daughter, after he had bullied her to the point beyond which he was afraid to go, he would drive down to the office, happy, jubilant.

"Dot is a true Arlington," he would mutter to himself, rubbing his hands together, "a true Arlington. Why, she's not afraid of anything, not even me."

All of which goes to prove that this old financier, like most successful men, was something of an egotist, something of a bully, and something of a father.

Now the bully was the most in evidence. His large, florid face hidden behind the paper, he seemed reading intently, but in reality his ears were pricked up to hear the conversation, his small twinkling blue eyes were ready at any moment to peer around the corner of the sheet, his big baritone voice was loaded and waiting, like a cannon, to silence the musketry of his family's whispered words. The tyrant of the household, he could not have been more terrible to his wife, elder daughter and grandson, if he had had thunderbolts in either hand and forked lightning in his glance.

Suddenly, at some unguarded word of Dorothy's, the old man's attentive ears caught the pretext they had been waiting for, and the paper was lowered from his face—like the unveiling of a statue—revealing the massive jaw, the broad forehead, the two indentations between the eyes.

"What did you say, Dot? Who was here yesterday?"

The girl hesitated for a moment. "Why, Hector McDonald, father," she said at last.

"Hector McDonald?" repeated Mr. Arlington, darting suspicious glances at his younger daughter. "Hector McDonald? That's the young man I don't like, isn't it?"

"Yes, you never did like him," said Dorothy with spirit; "but that doesn't say that I don't."

"You must like whom I like," said Arlington, drawing his bushy eyebrows together over his nose. "This Hector McDonald is a fool. Why, I know his uncle, and he told me about him. Wants to write poetry, or something of the sort."

"Well, what of it?" cried Dorothy, turning red. "What if he does write poetry?"

"Only this," continued the old man, disregarding the danger signals in her cheeks and pounding the table with his fists to add emphasis to his words—"only this, Dorothy; I'll have no poets sniveling around this house. There are enough petticoats here without him. A girl of your spirit—an Arlington—having such a weak-kneed whippersnapper hanging around! I'm ashamed of you, Dorothy. Why, I offered him a position in my office—wanted to see what kind of stuff he had in him. Work? Not he! He'd rather sit on a bench in the park and write verses to the nursemaids. He—"

But Dorothy was on her feet—her face flaming—her hands tightly clenched. Glancing at her, Arlington realized that he had at last overstepped the invisible line, and felt a flicker of fear.

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"Father!" cried the girl. "Father! I won't—"

At this moment the butler appeared in the pantry doorway, holding at arm's length, by a small wooden handle, a large round object tied up in white tissue-paper. The family scene between father and daughter was for the time being averted.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the servant, with a face as expressionless as the face of a snow man, "but this 'ere is left for Master Tom."

"For Master Tom, William?" said Arlington, glad of the interruption. "What is it? Who left it?"

"Hi don't know, sir, hexactly, but hi thinks there's some kind of hanimal in this, Mr. Arlington."

"But who brought it, William?"

"Hi don't know the man, sir. Hi never seen 'im before, but Hi know 'im fast enough if hever Hi lays eyes on 'im again. Hit was the size of 'im that struck me. When Hi opens the door, Hi says to myself, 'Good Lord, this ain't a man!' says Hi. 'Hit's a bloomin' giant hout of a story book!'"

"That will do, William," said Mr. Arlington sternly. "Put it down on the chair there."

The butler obeyed his master in silence, only shaking his head slowly from side to side in dumb testimony of the astonishing size of the man who had delivered the bundle. "Hit's most hamazin'," he mumbled to himself as the pantry door shut behind him—"most hamazin'."

Mr. Arlington fixed his grandson with a look, freezing that squirming, curious infant into dumb immobility; then, rising slowly to his feet, he approached the bundle and surveyed it suspiciously.

All watched with breathless interest, and Tommy—as soon as his ferocious grandfather's back was turned—began to wiggle plaintively, like a fish out of water. A pink cord held the tissue paper in place. This the old man broke between his thick, powerful fingers, and unwrapped the covering, disclosing to their view a large, shining bird cage.

"Oh!" cried the child, quite carried away by wonder and delight. "Oh, it's the parrot Uncle Hector said he'd bring me!"

For a moment all eyes were fixed on the cage and its restless inmate, the piratical pirate that, true to habit, still continued its everlasting acrobatics without giving so much as a look at the outer world.

"A parrot," said Arlington at last in a disgusted tone. "Who did you say gave it to you, Tommy?"

"Uncle Hector," answered the child promptly, quite oblivious to the warning frowns of both mother and aunt.

"Uncle Hector?" growled the old man, glowering at Dorothy. "Who told you to call that puppy 'Uncle Hector?'"

"I did," said his younger daughter in no uncertain tone of voice, and again danger signals flamed up in her cheeks.

"And I suppose you'll be teaching the child to call the butler 'Uncle Will,' and the washwoman 'Aunt Sissie!' Uncle Hector!—I'll Hector him!"

"That seems to be one of your traits, father, but with some people it isn't possible or profitable." Rising from the table, Dorothy looked her father straight in the eyes, and then turned and walked out of the room, leaving him, as usual, in a state of jubilant satisfaction.

"Ah," he said to himself, "that's one she scored off on the old man. Called me a bully right to my face. There's spirit for you!" But aloud he called after her, "We'll be receiving stolen goods if we keep that parrot. He must have taken it out of the store when the man wasn't looking. Where would he get the money to buy parrots? He's a pauper since his uncle turned him out—a miserable pauper!"

DOROTHY did not answer. She hurried up the stairs, biting her lips to hold the tears in check until she should reach the privacy of her own room. But Tommy, with a strange solemnity on his round face, began to defend his friend and benefactor.

"I know where Uncle Hector got the parrot, grandpa," said the child. "He went to Africa and grabbed it by the tail!"

"He told you that?" said the old man, approaching his grandson and standing over him truculently with his feet wide apart, his hands in his trouser-pockets. "He told you that because he's a liar."

"Oh, John," cried Mrs. Arlington in a voice like an echo, "the child is only a child, you know!"

"I didn't think he was a gorilla, Mrs. Arlington," retorted her energetic spouse, quelling her with a look. "Because he is a child, that's no reason why he should be lied to. I'm tired of having children lied to in this house, and I won't put up with it any longer.

"Grace"—and he ponited at his quailing elder daughter with a fateful finger—"Grace was lied to when she was a child, and look at her now. You were lied to when

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you were a child, and look at you now. No; this practice of lying to children has got to be stopped. Why, I shouldn't be surprised if one of you has told this poor misguided boy that there is a Santa Claus—has anybody told you that there is a Santa Claus, Tommy?"

"Oh, yes, grandpa! Mother and aunty and grandma says there is a Santa Claus, what comes to good little boys with toys and—"

"Ah, I knew it!" cried Mr. Arlington in triumph, enjoying himself immensely. "I knew it! In spite of all my orders, you've been lying to this child. You've founded his life on lies. When he goes to bed he's afraid of the dark, because you've lied to him about goblins and fairies. When he does anything he shouldn't, he's afraid Santa Claus won't visit him. Tell me, Tommy, what are you afraid of most? Some lie that your fond mother, aunt, or grandmother has told you, I'll wager my hat. Come, speak up, my little man—what are you afraid of most?"

"I'm afraid of you most, grandpa," said the child.

The old man started, and it seemed to him that he was standing over the Dorothy of other days. As a child, she would have answered thus. "Well, I was wrong," he muttered, "for I'm a fact and not a fancy. Some people might call me a brutal fact."

"Are you, grandpa?" asked the child.

Again Arlington started.

"Certainly, Tommy—certainly," he answered; and yet through his brain a flock of strange thoughts were flying about on restless wings. Perhaps the lie about Santa Claus, Tommy could believe—the lies about the parrot—the goblins and the fairies—yes; but the lie that seemed most real, the most overwhelming, the most terrible, was the lie that he, the grandfather had lived all his life.

And then it seemed absurd to the old man to lecture his wife and daughters. As laughably absurd as a housebreaker judging pickpockets. He was ordering them not to do something that he did every day—was doing at that very moment. For every time he shook his finger at the child—every time he frowned at him—he was lying to his grandson; for these gestures, these frowns, were the reflection of nothing within himself. They were merely lies—and nothing but lies.

Arlington was too good an actor not to enjoy his part, and so, shaking himself mentally, he began to act again.

"Now, Tommy," he continued, "Santa Claus is a lie, so don't believe in him. Uncle Hector is a lie, for he's no relation of yours—and I'll take good care that he never is. Nearly everything that anybody tells you is a lie.

"However, I will tell you the absolute truth. That parrot—and it's the most ordinary-looking parrot I ever saw—came from some bird store in the city. Probably it was stolen. As Hector McDonald will soon be, so now is this parrot. Its plumage is shabby—it looks poverty-stricken.

"Now I will give you a truthful prophecy. Some morning that bird will begin to scream and—"

"Uncle Hector said he would bring me one what would talk and swear beautiful."

"Lies—all lies! However, he may scream, as I say; he'll wake me up early in the morning—just once—and then—"

"Then?" repeated the child, looking up at his grandfather with great startled eyes.

"Then, Tommy," continued the old man, grinning ghoulishly at the infant and seizing his napkin in a powerful hand—"Then I will creep up to his cage—so! —and take him by the neck—thus!—and twist and twist, like I'm twisting this napkin, see?—till snap! goes his neck—and then no more parrot! Perhaps if you're a good boy, after he's dead I'll have him stuffed for you. How would you like that, Tommy?"

The child, who had been watching his grandfather with dilated eyes and pallid face, at this vivid climax to the old man's prophecy, burst into violent weeping.

"Oh, don't let grandpa hurt my parrot, mother!" he cried, throwing himself into his mother's arms. "I don't want him stuffed and dead; I want him livin' and swearin'. Don't let him touch my parrot, mother!"

"A lot she can help you," growled Arlington. "If it crosses my mind to wring its neck—at any time, day or night—I'll go and do it."

Realizing that he had reached his climax, that now was the time to make an artistic exit, the old man hurried from the room, and in a few minutes more was being whirled down to his office in a very pleasant state of mind.

Meanwhile Tommy sobbed on his mother's kind but spiritless bosom, while his grandmother whispered weak words of comfort into his ear.

"If he wrings your parrot's neck, dear," she said—and there was no doubt in the poor misguided lady's mind that her husband was quite capable of committing such

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a crime—"if he wrings its neck, Tommy dear, I will buy you another."

"I don't want another; I want him," said Tommy through his tears, and, hearing the front door shut behind the tyrant's back, his crying redoubled.

It was at this moment that Dorothy entered the room and proceeded to quiet her nephew. "Of course not, Tommy," she said. "Why I wouldn't allow such a thing for a minute. Just let him try—I'd like to see him!"

And the child, sensing the dormant strength in his aunt's character, deserted his mother's lap for Dorothy's, and nestled in her arms, looking up into her face trustfully.

"You're not afraid of grandpa, Aunt Dorothy?"

"No," answered Dorothy; "but I think he's a little bit afraid of me."

"And you won't let grandpa hurt my parrot, Aunt Dorothy?"

"No, dear."

But the parrot, all this time, seemed very ill at ease, climbing up and down the gilded bars, turning, twisting, now upside down, now right side up, always restless, as though filled with great anxiety.

He was like the prisoner who has heard his sentence read, and who knows that execution awaits him on the morrow; for no matter how daring this prisoner may be, fear now looks through his eyes and drives him about his cell, increasing the store of nervous energy that leaves with passing life.

So it was with the piratical parrot—he had heard his death sentence from Mr. Arlington's lips, and was a pitiful object.

What had become of that seafaring voice—those hearty curses—those bloodthirsty songs?

Why, the poor bird is stricken speechless from fear; for not once does a single word escape that trembling, lowered beak. In vain do they gather around him; in vain do they seek to dispel his gloom with "Pretty Poll" and crackers.

It is true that he eats, though in other respects he is but the gray ghost of a parrot—a forlorn feathered ghost that has left its voice behind in the grave.

CHAPTER III

IN THE SILENT NURSERY

HECTOR McDONALD stood at the window, looking out at Thirty-Fourth Street. It was a hot, sultry day in August. The city seemed to be bubbling, like a huge caldron, beneath the rays of a burning sun. And every sound—the rumbling of heavy wheels, the jolting of the streetcars over the tracks, the insistent cries of newsboys—rose to him accentuated in volume, shrill and fretful as the voice of haggling old age.

Beneath him on the pavement a dingy crowd was passing—a crowd with wilted collars and drooping plumes. They plodded on with downcast eyes, like a drove of driven beasts.

Some moved their lips as they walked, like somnambulists living in a dream; some, flourishing their rolled-up newspapers threateningly, hurried past with fixed frowns on their perspiring foreheads; some strolled by leisurely, stopping every now and then before a shop window with the air of people who are in search of something.

And, in the middle of the street, trolley cars whined and muttered, truck drivers swore at the broad backs of their horses, automobiles flowed steadily and monotonously, with an occasional peremptory honk.

Everything was seething with hot, tormenting life. And one felt, in looking down, that New York was only a woman after all—a giantess whose nerves were finally giving away.

McDonald had taken up these quarters the day after he left his uncle's house. It was a single room immediately above a dentist's office—small, poorly furnished, and cheap.

It had two dusty windows commanding a view of the street, a closet, two worn-out chairs, a bureau with a cracked mirror, and a picture of cattle grazing in a field.

When he had first moved in, the young man had been attracted to the place because of its shabbiness, its cheerlessness, its dissimilarity to his own room at home.

He had read of geniuses who lived in garrets—geniuses who in time had startled the world. A garret seemed the natural background to any literary success.

And even the groans and laments ascending from the office of the dentist added a certain zest and piquancy to life. Listening to them as he typed his sinister mystery stories, they stimulated his imagination—they even wove themselves into the plots.

He had enjoyed the novelty of this new life at first, but had soon grown tired of it. As the weeks passed, the room began to oppress him.

It seemed to be growing smaller, day

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by day. It was almost as though the ceiling were descending—as though the walls were drawing in. And the furniture seemed literally to be falling to pieces.

A leg had come off the bureau; now the springs of the bed were giving way. At night, when he tried to sleep, it was as though someone had suddenly pumped all the air out of the room—it became difficult to breathe. And he would sit up gasping the warm, fetid breath of the city into his lungs.

At these times, how he longed for the country! He thought of Mr. Graham's place on the Sound—its cool, refreshing breezes; its tall, swaying trees, its green, shadowy lawn. And thinking of what he had lost, he felt a great hatred for his uncle.

At first he had enjoyed this new life as though it were a game—a game called Poverty. He played it like a child, delighting in the poorly cooked food of the Bohemian restaurants, the foreigners one saw deftly eating macaroni, the ceaseless chatter of alien tongues.

That Polish man sitting in one corner—the man with the long, black beard and glittering eyes—had been to him a Svengali; that Frenchman with the broad expanse of forehead, mumbling to himself, might very well have been another Claude Lantier. Giving his imagination full sway, he had enjoyed it all.

But, alas, the game had lost its charm. The stern god of facts had ruthlessly destroyed his air castles one by one. These Bohemian restaurants—which he had imagined to be peopled with writers, artists, musicians—dwindled into dirty little cafés where one could get poor food, poorly cooked, at a very low price; and their denizens, riffraff who seldom washed themselves, and who devoured their victuals in a disgusting fashion.

But these were not the worst of McDonald's troubles. In comparison with his rejected manuscripts, they seemed trifling.

During all this time, not one of his many stories had been accepted. And this seemed incomprehensible to the young man.

He had worked so conscientiously on them; he had toiled each day to make them as perfect as he could; he had sent them out so confidently; and then, ah, then—they had been returned. What was the reason for it? Surely they were as good as those he read in the magazines.

But perhaps Uncle Tobias was right—perhaps he was a self-deluded fool. And at this thought Hector would grind his teeth in impotent despair.

Of late he had been very lonely. The Arlingtons had gone away for the summer, and, with the exception of the acquaintances whom he chanced to meet, there had been no one to talk with, no one to cheer him up. The single bright spot in his horizon was the bird store.

Since his first visit, the young man had gone there many times, attracted thither by the proficiency of the parrots, the oddities of the old lady, and by a certain interest he took in the baby.

McDonald was a great lover of children; and this one had a certain owlish solemnity of face, a certain dreamy depth of eyes, a certain evenness of disposition, that attracted him.

He had nicknamed the baby "The Silent One"; and was wont to chaff the kind old lady on the fact that, although her birds were like so many old maids for gossip, her tiny nephew was usually as dumb as a stone image. Sometimes, driven to desperation by the child's silence, Hector would contrive ways and means to make it speak.

He would offer it a penny to hear it say "Thank you"; and, if this failed, he would go to the other extreme. When the old lady's back was turned, he would rumple its hair and blow cigarette smoke in its face. This second course of action usually made the baby's black eyes light up with passion for a moment, but his pent-up emotions never broke out in a wail of "Aunty! Aunt!" or anything of the sort.

No; he accepted everything—pennies, hair-rumpling, and cigarette smoke—in the same somber, stolid silence—a silence which provoked even while it interested the young man.

HE TURNED his back on the window, and, walking over to the bureau, stared dejectedly at the pile of manuscripts lying on it. Six short stories rested here, unhonored and unsung—the work of as many weeks—the poor dead children of his brain.

With what bright hopes had he sent them out into the world, and with what bitterness and sorrow did he find them home again! And yet, with the foolish fondness of a loving father, he did not blame them for their failure. No; rather did he blame those cold-hearted manuscript monarchs—the editors—who held the power of life or death in their careless hands. Why had they dealt so unfairly,

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so cruelly, so harshly, with these, his children? Perhaps they had judged them without a hearing; perhaps they had sent them back without turning the pages? Yes, it must be that.

The young man ran his hand across his forehead with a weary gesture. Many days of constant work and confinement had taken a certain amount of youthful buoyancy from him.

Despondency was a new acquaintance, and he felt that he must rid himself of this unwelcome guest. Of late it had peered over his shoulder, even guided his hand as he wrote, and, in consequence, his work had become more unsuited to the public's demands.

In spite of himself, he had begun to look into the face of tomorrow, and for the first time in his life he had found her thin, emaciated, with hunger-haunting eyes. His money was going fast; and, what was worse, under the load of continual disappointment and prolonged mental labor, his courage, too, was going.

Even now, half unconsciously, he pulled out of his pocket a thin roll of bills and began to count them slowly, cautiously, yet eagerly.

"Ten dollars left," he said to himself—"only ten! I will make it last me two weeks."

"And then?" whispered Despondency.

"Why, then my clothes—they should bring me something."

"And then?" repeated the relentless shadow.

"Oh, hell!" the young man burst out suddenly, apostrophizing the grim specter at his elbow. "Oh, hell, get away with you! Don't bother me any more. My luck's bound to change, and there's lots of time yet—lots. Meanwhile, I'll take a walk and lose you."

McDonald picked up his hat and coat, and hurried from the room. As he descended the creaking stairs, he whistled gaily, challengingly; and when he shut the front door behind him, it was with unnecessary violence—as though he were slamming it in the face of an enemy.

Soon he was mingling with the sweating crowds. Turning up Fifth Avenue, he walked rapidly for several blocks and, in spite of the heat, began to feel a little more like his old self.

As he was passing Tilton's, he saw a necktie in the window which caught his eye. Coming to an abrupt halt, he surveyed it for some time with a look of longing. In his days of affluence he would have walked in and purchased it. Unfortunately, those days were past.

As he stood there, feasting his eyes on this display of haberdashery, a hand fell on his arm. Wheeling about, he came face to face with his uncle.

The old gentleman looked especially well. His eyes were clear and bright. His complexion was bronzed by a summer spent near the water. He had put on flesh and had that air of affluent well-being which comes from good clothes, good food, and a large bank account.

At sight of him, McDonald felt a hot wave of blood surge into his head. While he had been starving, his uncle had been feasting; while he had been forced to go without the necessities of life, his uncle had been wallowing in luxuries. Now, no doubt, this old tyrant had sought him out to poke fun at him.

Mr. Graham smiled rather superciliously at his nephew. "You don't look very prosperous, Hector," he said. "I expect you've had enough of writing by this time?"

And then McDonald, with all the bitterness of the months seething within him, looked at his uncle straight in the eye and said coldly, "Good afternoon, sir." In a moment more the young man had vanished in the crowd.

MRS. BLAKE sat in the little back room of the bird store. She was knitting a huge woolen sock, rather slowly and awkwardly. Beside her chair was the wicker baby carriage, and in it, sitting bolt upright, was the child who had been sleeping on Hector's first visit to the shop.

On this afternoon there was a newcomer beside the fireplace, none other than "Cousin Harry"—a gigantic young man who, even in a sitting position, seemed to take up more than his allotted space in the small room.

He sat reading the newspaper, bending forward in his chair, his huge bristling chin resting in the hollow of a tremendous palm. From time to time his dull, brown eyes wandered to the blazing logs with a complete lack of speculation in their depths.

The old lady's head was bent over her knitting. She seemed engrossed in it, in spite of her laboriously slow movements, and only glanced up now and then at her tiny nephew. The child returned her look with a certain solemnity of expression which seemed to grate on his aunt's nerves, for she dropped a stitch or two.

She muttered something under her

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breath and, shaking her head till her white curls rustled like the petals of a pale flower, she threw the sock on the floor and put her foot on it.

"I've started too late!" she cried. "It's no use! I can't learn! I don't care whether people expect it or not. I won't learn—that's all."

For a moment there was a dead silence in the room. The gigantic Cousin Harry was engrossed in his paper; the child stared solemnly and silently at his aunt, and the old lady's eyes wandered here, there, and everywhere. Finally Mrs. Blake, with a sigh, reached down and picked up the discarded sock.

Evidently ashamed of her outbreak of temper, she began to work again hurriedly, with a sidelong look at the baby carriage.

Cousin Harry broke the silence at last. Looking up from his paper, he tapped a certain paragraph with a great, blunt finger and, turning his chair so that he faced aunt and nephew, spoke in a strange, rumbling voice which reminded one of a truck rolling over cobblestones.

"Here's the article," said he. "Listen. This is New York's latest murder mystery."

The child's eyes left his aunt's face and became fixed on Cousin Harry. There was an unhealthy interest mirrored on their blank, shining surface, that was strange in one so young. "Go on. Read it," he piped.

"Yes," said the old lady, laying aside her knitting with alacrity. "Read it."

E. S. GLOVER FOUND MURDERED—FAMOUS GEMS ARE MISSING

Police Baffled by Method of Crime Which Apparently Had Robbery as Its Motive.

E. S. Glover, widely known for his almost priceless collection of rare jewels, was murdered some time during Monday night in the conservatory in his home on Riverside Drive. The body was discovered this morning by Mr. Glover's butler, Thomas Rorke. Robbery, apparently, was the motive of the crime. Mr. Glover's jewels had been stripped from the body, wrenched off the fingers, torn from the shirt-bosom.

The manner in which the murder was accomplished cannot be discovered. Police detectives acknowledge themselves baffled by the mystery.

At first it was thought that the crime had been committed in the library, which opens out of the conservatory, and that the body had been dragged into the conservatory to conceal it until morning. However, after examination of both rooms, this theory had to be discarded.

The bloodstains beside the body prove that it was in the conservatory the unfortunate financier met his death. Further evidence to prove that the crime was committed in the conservatory is the discovery that a small pane of glass directly above where the head of the murdered man lay had been broken.

The aperture is not large enough even to admit a good-sized monkey. Evidently it was caused by a blow from the iron bar which killed Mr. Glover. Yet, here is another *puzzling fact: Why should* Mr. Glover go into the conservatory late at night? There were no lights, and he could see neither his birds nor his plants. Besides it was his custom never to—

"Why," cried the old lady in surprise, clapping her hands together, "why, it's the old gentleman who bought one of my parrots the other day!"

"And perhaps," broke in Cousin Harry, grinning until he looked like an ogre out of a fairy tale, "perhaps your parrot called him out, perhaps he called him by name."

"Oh, no," cried the old lady, "he couldn't do that very well."

But all this seemed to affect the nerves of her little nephew, for suddenly, without the slightest warning, he burst out into a piercing wail. The old lady and Cousin Harry interchanged glances, but before they could console the child, Hector McDonald's voice came to them from the shop:

"Oh, Mrs. Blake, I've come to call on you and the parrots. But what's happened to the Silent One?"

"He's all right, sir," cried the old lady cheerily. "Just a touch of nerves. Nothing serious. Step right in, sir. Willie will be quiet in a moment."

No sooner had the young man entered the little back room, than the child ceased his howling as suddenly as though a cork had been wedged into his open mouth; and, dropping his tiny hands from his round, red face, his black, shoe-button eyes stared at the newcomer with all their wonted sullen stolidity of expression.

"It's wonderful what an effect you have on that child," continued the old lady. "When you're here, he's always good. He thinks a lot of you, sir, that's apparent. But I don't think you know Cousin Harry. Cousin Harry, this is Mr. McDonald, who is kind enough to call on a lonely lady now and then."

Hector's eyes wandered to the giant beside the fireplace, who, like a mountain, at close proximity was almost too big to see.

This was especially true when Cousin Harry was on his feet, as he was now, with one great hand extended, and his mass of tangled hair brushing the cobwebs from

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the ceiling. McDonald examined the features of that huge face one by one—the sleepy mouth—and yet the combination of them was as though he were examining some gigantic waxen mask at a museum. He felt that he was too near it, and must retreat a dozen paces before he could appreciate the natural proportions.

Never in all his life had he felt half so weak and childlike as he did at that moment, looking up at the man before him. He extended a white tentative hand, and it vanished—devoured in an instant by a brawny fist.

"How are you?" stammered Hector, wincing as he felt Cousin Harry's viselike grip. "How are you? This is a pleasure."

"I'm very glad to meet you," growled the giant, and, as though to prove his assertion, he tightened his hold on McDonald's hand till the young man rose up on his toes from pain.

"WELL, well," cried the old lady pleasantly, "now we're all friends. I'm glad you happened to drop in while Cousin Harry is here. He's often said he wanted to meet you. You look surprised, Mr. McDonald; I guess you didn't expect to find Cousin Harry so big, did you, sir? Most people don't."

"No," said Hector, "I didn't." He extracted his hand from the giant's grasp—a hand that had turned red and limp. "Nor so strong," he finished regarding it ruefully.

"He is strong," said the old lady, "very strong. There are mighty few as strong as he. He's so strong, that sometimes he don't quite know how strong he is, which is unfortunate, sir."

"Yes, that is unfortunate."

"But with all his strength," continued the old lady proudly, "Cousin Harry is quite gentle, too—especially with children. Why, do you know, I often let him take care of little Willie, here. He's just as careful and kind to that child as any woman could be."

"You don't say so," said McDonald politely.

"Yes, they're devoted—those two. To see that great man and that little child together—why, it almost brings the tears to me eyes. Such devotion! It's religious, too. It reminds me of the lion lying down with the lamb."

"I see," said Hector. "But tell me, Mrs. Blake, how are all the parrots? Is the philosophic parrot with you yet?

"No, Mr. McDonald, I sold him last week. Now here's a terrible thing that happened. Cousin Harry was just reading it out of the newspaper.

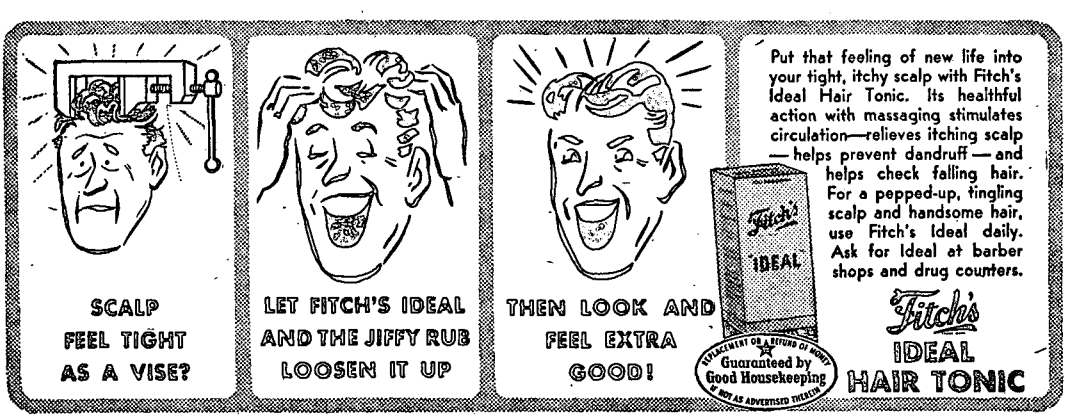
"The customer we sold that parrot to was a gentleman by the name of Glover, and last night he was murdered. It sort of brings the horribleness of a crime like that home—when you've seen and spoken to the gentleman that was murdered.

"He came in here just as hearty and pleasant spoken last week, and now he's cold and dead. It kind of gives me the shivers, thinking of it." And her white curls shook like silver tassels as she bent over her work.

"That is a coincidence, certainly," said the young man thoughtfully. "I read the case this morning. It seems as though somebody inside the house must have murdered him, and yet the broken pane in the conservatory gave me a clue. Of course, it might have been broken by the blow that killed the old man, but then again it might—"

"What?" cried the old lady and Cousin Harry in a breath.

"Why," continued Hector carelessly, "it might have been broken from the outside so that the murderer could strike his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victim without entering, or as a way of letting the thief in. Possibly it was used for both."

"How's that?" growled Cousin Harry unpleasantly. "What do you mean by—"

"But, Mr. McDonald," broke in the old lady hurriedly, "how could the murderer know that Mr. Glover was going out into the conservatory that night? And how could a thief get through a hole that, as the paper says was scarcely big enough for a monkey to pass through?"

"Yes, that's so," said the young man. "And yet that phrase about the monkey gave me an idea. Perhaps it was a monkey that stole the jewels—a small monkey that had been trained to do it. You've seen the ones organ grinders have that will hunt in your pockets for pennies? Well, then, why couldn't they be trained to steal jewels? It seems to me quite possible."

Cousin Harry burst into a roar of laughter that sounded like a dozen barrels rolling down hill; the old lady tittered faintly; and even the Silent One smiled, although his round, black eyes were glittering unpleasantly.

"Haw! Haw!" shouted the giant. "Haw! Haw! a monkey! Do you hear that, Willie? Do you hear that, Willie? A dirty, hairy little ape pulled off a job like this. No brains needed—just a dirty little ape, and an iron club—that's all."

If Hector McDonald had been looking at the Silent One then, he would have been startled by the strange, intense light in the child's eyes—the unwonted flush on the round cheeks—the trembling of the little hands.

However, he did not notice these signs of nervous excitement, and continued rather irritably:

"Laugh if you want to, but there may be more truth in what I said than you think. If all crimes are to be solved by commonplace reasoning the criminal genius will be as safe as the King of England. I don't see anything impossible about the monkey idea."

Perhaps the old lady had noticed the unhealthy excitement of her little nephew, for at this point she changed the subject adroitly. "Speaking about clever criminals reminds me," said she— "How's the Pirate getting along these days?"

"Now that's one of the things I came to see you about," said Hector, forgetting his pique on the instant. "That parrot hasn't said a single word since he's been at the Arlingtons'. I've asked him to speak in identically the same words that you used; I've fed him sunflower seed, but all in vain. He's as silent as an imitation parrot."

"He must be grieving for me," said the old lady, shaking her head sadly. "That's the way with those birds when they're attached to anyone. Sometimes they mourn for months. It takes time to heal their hearts. It's no use bothering him yet. It may be a week, and it may be a year, but when he does start talking you won't be able to stop him."

"It's been rather embarrassing," said Hector. "You see, I've told the whole family such wonderful stories about that parrot, that I felt at the time they only half believed me. Now, with the exception of Dorothy, they all think me a liar of the first water."

"Well, well," said the kind old lady soothingly, "it will come out all right in the end. Never you fear about that. Even if I have to visit the Pirate myself and—"

"No, no, ma'am," broke in Cousin Harry, staring stupidly at the fire. "That won't be necessary, ma'am, that won't be necessary. You visit the parrot, ma'am? Oh, no, ma'am—that won't be necessary."

But little Willie, the Silent One stared stonily at McDonald and said never a word.

ON THE afternoon following his last visit to the bird-store, Hector McDonald sought to break the piratical parrot's magic spell of silence with these simple extemporaneous lines:

Your eloquence I fain would seek;
Come, open wide your silent beak,
And speak, green creature, speak, oh, speak.

He stood before the cage in an attitude of supplication, while Tommy's toy dogs, toy cats, toy elephants, and especially his rocking horse, regarded the young man coldly and superciliously.

A child who played the part of a man they could understand, but a man who played the part of a child was indeed incomprehensible.

"I don't believe he'll ever speak," cried Dorothy. "He hasn't said a single word since he's been here."

"I know, but you must give him a chance to get used to his surroundings!"

"He's been here six months already, Hector!"

"Mrs. Blake says that sometimes it takes a year before they feel at home. Mark my words, some day you'll come in and hear that parrot talking a blue streak. I imagine you'll have trouble shutting him up."

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"I wish he would talk," said Dorothy, sighing. "Nobody in the house believes he ever will. Your reputation for veracity depends upon it, Hector. The first thing father asks when he comes home at night is whether the parrot has said anything yet. He takes a positive delight in hearing that he hasn't. You see you told me such a lot about him, that—"

Hector turned away from the cage and, crossing the room to where his fiancée sat by the nursery window, put his hand on her shoulder and looked down into her eyes.

"Don't you believe me, Dorothy?" he asked slowly.

"Yes, of course, I do."

"Then you believe me when I say that that parrot can talk wonderfully—can even recite poetry?"

"Yes, I believe you, Hector."

"Well, then, that's all I care about. Some day he'll talk as I heard him at the store, but for the time being he's more for action. Look at him running around the cage as though the devil were after his tail feathers. There's perpetual motion for you."

"He's always like that," said Dorothy. "Sometimes I think that if father came in and watched him for a while, he'd invent something useful for him to do with all that wasted energy."

"Be careful, Dorothy," said the young man seriously, "it's the practical, commercial blood in your veins that gives you such ideas—ideas that are responsible for signboards on the verdant meadows; ideas that turn roaring cataracts into docile mill hands.

"Nature is a goddess to be worshiped, but the world is filled with her desecraters—men who, if they could, would tear the stars out of the heavens and sell them for precious stones in the market place; men quite careless of what has gone before, of what will come hereafter—tenants of the earth who would leave the Master's house in ruins when they go."

"Oh, Hector," cried Dorothy, "I love to hear you talk that way. If only you would be more serious at times. You haven't spoken so in months."

"No," answered McDonald, "I haven't. Everything in my life has been so serious of late that naturally I've been flippant to preserve a balance."

"Please be serious, Hector. Tell me about your work. Has anything been accepted yet?"

"No, and it never will be until I turn thief, bigamist, or murderer."

"What?"

"Yes, exactly so. The key of crime fits the lock of fame nowadays. Show me a man who has committed some blood-red deed, some deed that shocks the world to silence, and I will show you a man who can have his words of wisdom printed in any periodical of the day.

"He doesn't even have to be a good writer. That isn't necessary. He may butcher the English language, as he has his victim, yet the magazines will take his stuff; no, more than that, they'll come and beg him for it. A little later you'll read his story: 'Gambling with the Gangsters,' by Sam the Strangler; 'Doublecrossing the Devil,' by Gimlet Gyp; or 'From the Crib to the Electric Chair,' by Bloody Bill.

"And what delicious tidbits of literature they are. You often wonder how they strike grammatical English as well as they do; and you are impressed with the feeling that beneath the playfully rough exteriors of 'Sam, the Strangler,' 'Gimlet Gyp' and 'Bloody Bill,' are fine sterling qualities, qualities that under a different environment would have made of these bad men good citizens, the kind that stand up and cheer when the band plays 'The Star-Spangled Banner.'"

"You're growing bitter," said Dorothy, looking steadfastly at the young man.

"I am," assented Hector. "All failures are bitter, and I'm a failure until I've murdered somebody. I've been thinking it over lately, and unless I commit some kind of crime, like strangling little Tommy or hitting Uncle Tobias over the head, my chances for literary success are null and void. I can only be famous by first being infamous, Dorothy."

"But you mustn't talk that way. Of course, it's all right with me, but somebody else might take you seriously, and if anything really did happen to your Uncle Tobias, they would—"

"Blame me for it? Exactly. That's what I long for, Dorothy. Of course, I don't wish any harm to Uncle Toby, and if anybody did tap him on the head and I was arrested on suspicion, think of the chance it would give me to sell my murder stories. The newspapers brimming over with a murder mystery, and stories to be had from the apparent murderer; all the magazines in the country would be after me!"

"And the electrician in Sing Sing would quickly disprove their assertion," broke in Dorothy. "You haven't thought of that, Hector."

"But I have," replied the young man.

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"I've thought of it many, many times. I would prove my innocence at the trial. I would go out of the prison a free and glorified man; and then, as always happens in the best sellers, I would marry and live happily ever afterward."

"Father often says that your brain is a storeroom filled with mental toys," said Dorothy thoughtfully, "and for the once I agree with him. You take a thought, as a child picks out a purple cow, because of its unnatural and impossible color, and you play with it quite contentedly for weeks, realizing all the time that it can never mature into anything."

"And I can only answer, Dorothy, that I prefer mental toys to ledgers, bankbooks and safes. It's not such a load to carry around on one's shoulders. Probably no one will ever brain Uncle Tobias or strangle little Tommy, but still there's a certain pleasure in thinking that they will. Now don't be shocked—you know what I mean."

"Yes, but it's lucky for you that Tommy's mother isn't here, for she wouldn't."

"And before she gets back," said McDonald, "I'll leave. I know that I'd make some kind of fool remark. Besides, for the last few minutes I've been conscious of a certain frigidity in the atmosphere that presages the coming of your male parent. Probably at this very moment he is hurtling toward us from his den of commercialism. Your father, like all great events, casts his shadow before. Are you coming down with me? Good. Like the policeman, I find myself best at whispering sweet nothings in the vestibule."

They left the nursery like two children, hand in hand, leaving behind them in the dusky room the mute, dejected toys. The rocking horse alone still maintained its stiff unbending look of equine superiority.

The broad staircase and the great hall beneath it were alive with crawling shadows; the paintings on the wall were erased by the careless hand of night, and everything had become vague, unreal; even the youthful figures descending through the gloom.

Hector had some difficulty in finding his hat. "William will catch it if your father comes home and finds the hall as dark as this," he said.

"I'll warn him in time."

"That's like you, Dorothy. You're always so kind."

He kissed her and, opening the front door, stepped out into the twilight. Dorothy remained motionless for a moment, and then, moved by a sudden impulse, followed him. Standing on the stoop, she watched his retreating figure.

For several yards his step was steady and sure, then it faltered somewhat, and his shoulders drooped. He never looked back, never saw her watching him with that maternal air which only good women give to those they love.

Now he plodded on wearily, and, far down the shadowy street, above the flickering city lights, a host of gray storm-clouds were gathering.

AN HOUR after Hector McDonald's departure found Dorothy and her sister in the nursery performing the solemn rites that invaribly attended Tommy's bedtime. On this evening, owing to the serious illness of the nurse's mother, they were forced to assume all the responsibility.

They had given the child a bath, put on his nightgown, and placed him in his crib; but at this point their actual troubles really began. Tommy sat bolt upright and, with the wrath of an abused monarch, demanded that every one of his toy animals should be brought to him for the good night kiss.

"Nellie brings 'em to me," he wailed. "Even my mangy rabbit with the bushy tail."

There was no use in defying Tommy; no use in stealthily leaving the room on some pretext, not to return again until sleep had claimed him for her own. The child was his grandfather over again in obstinacy. When he wanted a thing he was quite capable of keeping the whole house awake until he got it. Realizing this, mother and aunt accepted the inevitable and the hunt began. Zebras, lions, elephants and cats were dragged from their lairs to the youthful monarch's bedside, where their virtues, oddities and histories were fully dwelt upon. Even the mangy rabbit with the bushy tail—an especial favorite—was discovered under the bed in hiding, and was dragged out to be imprisoned in Tommy's chubby arms.

What a menagerie the child had! What a memory the child had! Time and again the two women thought that the hunt must be over, only to have their hopes shattered by the command, "I want my green frog," or, "I want my monkey," and the chase would commence all over again. All things have to end, and at last every one of the animals had been found, presented and kissed.

The rocking horse alone remained. It was a stalwart example of its kind, this

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This thing that Tucker saw in his own store window—this new and terrifying dummy—he had never seen before. Horror stole over him as he stood beside the policeman. . . .

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rocking horse, and it was moved only with difficulty. Dorothy seized it firmly by the mane and pulled with all her might, her sister pushed it from behind and, between the two of them, they at last succeeded in bringing it up to the crib, where it submitted to Tommy's caress with the curling lip of scorn peculiar to rocking horses. The child seemed satisfied with this last herculean feat. He sank back on his pillow, and was soon fast asleep.

Dorothy seated herself beside his crib, while Mrs. Smithers hurried out of the room to get some of her personal belongings. Several minutes passed and then a light knock sounded outside. Rising to her feet, the girl tiptoed across the floor and opened the door. "Sh!" she whispered with her fingers to her lips. "Tommy's asleep."

"It's honly me, ma'am," said the butler, in a low but anxious voice, and Dorothy noticed that the man's usually blank face was alive with some strange mixture of emotion.

"What is it, William?" she asked quickly. "I hope that nothing's happened to father?"

"Ho, no, ma'am. Set your mind heasy. Nothing's 'appened to 'im, as I know of, ma'am. Hit's somethin' as I found hout in the vestibule hall wrapped up in a rubber coat."

"Out in the vestibule? What is it, William?"

"Hit's—but come and look for yourself, ma'am. Step down to the 'allway. Hi'd like for you to see it yourself, ma'am."

Dorothy, burning with excitement, followed the bewildered butler down the stairs and into the now brightly lighted hallway. There, in one corner, near the door, lay a large black bundle. She approached it and, bending down, saw two beady eyes staring up at her.

"Good heavens, William!" she gasped. "It's a baby!"

"That's what Hi say, ma'am," said the butler with stoic composure. "But where it 'as come from do beat me."

"Yes," repeated Dorothy, staring dazedly into the two steady, shoebutton eyes beneath her, "where could it have come from?"

"Hit's raining as if it were cats and dogs houtside, ma'am," suggested William, with a sickly smile, "but—"

At this point Dorothy's presence of mind returned, and she cut the man short. "Run upstairs and tell Mrs. Smithers I want her," she ordered.

WHEN Tommy's mother arrived on the scene, it was to find Dorothy the center of a crowd of wildly excited servants, holding in her arms a black-eyed baby whose stoic indifference of face rivaled even the butler's habitual lack of expression. Miss Arlington had removed the rubber coat and now held the child firmly, if unscientifically, disclosing the fact to the astonished group that it wore merely the flimsiest of nightgowns.

"Well, what do you think, Grace?" asked Dorothy.

"I'm sure I don't know," said Mrs. Smithers weakly. "What do you think?"

"I think that it's an outrage!" cried the girl, with spirit. "Why the poor little thing had nothing over it but that rubber coat! It's murder, that's what it is!"

"Hit's houtrageous, ma'am," said William with conviction, "hand yet it 'appens. When Hi was in London, Hi 'eard of cases. Habandoned creatures is what Hi calls 'em, hasking your pardon, ma'am."

"And you found it outside the house?" asked Mrs. Smithers.

"Hi found 'im, ma'am," said the butler, stepping forward. "Hi 'eard the bell ring; Hi answered it; and there 'e was on the mat."

"And he hasn't cried once," broke in Dorothy. "He's a brave little fellow. But we must get him in bed before he catches cold."

"But where, Dorothy?" asked her sister nervously.

"Why, in the nursery, of course—in the crib Tommy used to have before he outgrew it."

"But Tommy sleeps in the nursery."

"Well, what of it, Grace?" cried Dorothy, moved by the plight of her new-found protégé. "It won't do Tommy any harm to sleep in the same room with another baby. You'll make him a little snob."

"There are diseases—" began Tommy's mother.

"Nonsense! Look at his cheeks. I never saw a more healthy looking child."

"Father wouldn't like it, Dorothy."

"Bother father! Even if he doesn't like it, he'll have to put up with it for tonight, at least. You don't think I'd throw him out in the rain again, do you?"

"There are charitable organizations," suggested Mrs. Smithers timidly. "Perhaps if we called up the police station—"

"The police station? I should say not! Come, the child might catch pneumonia while we stand here arguing."

And so saying, Dorothy Arlington, with

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tight-pressed lips and authoritative mien, still holding the child in her strong arms, started up the staircase, followed by her sister. They found Tommy still sleeping, but at the sound of their footsteps and the bustle attending the making up of his old crib to receive the tiny visitor, he awoke, and, seeing the child with the expressionless black eyes, he burst into a veritable wail of terror. At last he quieted somewhat, but continued to cast fearful glances at his guest from time to time.

They had put the little foundling to bed; and his tiny round face, surmounted by its stiff black hair, lay on the pillow with a kind of dull resignation. As Dorothy said, he was more like a doll than a child.

When he was placed in any position he remained in that position until he was moved. One felt that his beady, steadfast eyes would remain open till you touched the spring that closed them. His ambition in life seemed already to have been formed—the ambition to go through life as a stick of furniture, to be moved, to be used, perhaps to be abused, and to remain dumb.

A lack of expression can conceal the workings of the mind and the age of the mind. Father Time as often looks out of our eyes as he writes his signature on our foreheads.

"I wonder why he doesn't say anything, Grace?" asked Dorothy. "Do you think that he's too young?"

"No; I should say he was three. Perhaps he's dumb."

"Do you want anything to eat, dear?" said Dorothy, bending over her protégé.

The thin red lips never trembled; the black, beady eyes remained fixed on the ceiling.

"Oh, he is dumb, the poor litle thing! Perhaps that's the reason his wicked parents wanted to get rid of him. But we must give him something to eat. Nellie, run downstairs and tell the cook to send up some milktoast. Hurry, please."

After the milktoast had been prepared, served and eaten, Mrs. Smithers went up to her own room to get some of the things she had left there in the excitement of the butler's news. Dorothy remained, attempting to amuse the little waif with Tommy's toys, very much to that gentleman's indignation, expressed in another series of long-drawn wails.

At last Mrs. Smithers returned to find Dorothy at her wits' end in trying to amuse her protégé. She had just given him the mangy rabbit with the fuzzy tail, only to see that cherished relic favored with a cold unseeing stare.

What could cause that sombre little face to light up for a single instant? Evidently nothing. She had tried all her wiles and they had failed. She looked at him hopelessly, and then, at that very moment, she saw a sudden change—a sudden flash of light in the gloomy eyes.

The child seemed to be looking past her. Turning, she saw her sister, now dressed for dinner, entering the room. What could interest him in that, she wondered?

Suddenly the child stretched out his arms toward Mrs. Smithers with a strange, gurgling noise, like water running out of the end of a bottle; and in a flash Dorothy knew what had excited him so, what he craved for. It was her sister's glittering diamond necklace; the necklace her father had given her for a wedding present.

"Come over here, Grace," she called. "He wants to see your diamond necklace. Thank Heavens, I have found something to interest him."

"Goo, goo, goo," gurgled the child.

"Just a moment, Dorothy; I've got to put my jewel case in the drawer. I almost forgot it, and left it upstairs in the excitement. It would have kept me awake all night if I had. I can never sleep unless they're near me—all those dear things of Fred's."

As Mrs. Smithers crossed the room and put the round jewel case in the upper drawer, not once did the child's strange black eyes leave her. He seemed to be beckoning her back with them. "The poor dear has probably never seen a necklace before," thought Dorothy.

"Come here, Grace," she called.

The elder woman turned and approached the crib leisurely. At her every step the eyes of the child seemed to grow brighter. It was as though they reflected the cold, scintilating light of the precious stones. Now Mrs. Smithers was beside him; and, obeying her sister's directions, she bent over the tiny waif so that the necklace swung just above his face.

"Goo, goo, goo," he gurgled; and before Tommy's mother could cry out, before Dorothy could move, a little firm hand shot out from the bedclothes, seized the diamond necklace and pulled at it with all its might. There was a cry of indignation and pain from Mrs. Smithers, an exclamation of surprise from Dorothy, then a sharp snap. The necklace parted, slipped off the lady's neck and remained in the child's eager fingers.

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"Good Heavens!" cried Mrs. Smithers indignantly. "He's broken my necklace! I hope you're satisfied, Dorothy!" She pried open the hands of the waif and regained her property.

"Don't be angry, Grace," said Dorothy; "I'm sure the baby didn't mean to hurt your necklace; besides, it's only a link in the chain. You can easily have it fixed. He was just a trifle overeager, that's all."

"I should think he was! He's terrible strong, too. Why, the chain actually cut into my neck! Well, I'll put the necklace into my jewelbox and take it down to Tiffany's tomorrow."

Again Mrs. Smithers crossed the room to the bureau, and again the child followed her with his eyes. Dorothy wondered why they should still wear that look of pleased anticipation now that his toy was taken out of his reach. It was strange how dull they had been at first, and how bright they were now. The face of the baby seemed to have been changed by them, and to have grown older—years older.

"Do you know that we'll be very late for dinner, Dorothy?" said her sister. "William announced it while I was upstairs getting my things together. I'm going to make Tommy say his prayers, and then we've got to go right down. You know how unpleasant father is when we're late."

"Very well, Grace; but getting Tommy to say his prayers isn't such an easy matter."

But here Dorothy was wrong. Tommy, for the once, showed a perfect willingness to say his prayers.

No, more than that, for instead of mumbling through them, as he usually did, he now said them slowly and distinctly, with a scared look from time to time at the little black-eyed stranger across the room.

"Good night, dear," said Dorothy; and walking over to the light, she turned it very low and followed her sister out of the room.

The two children were alone with the shadows. Only a tiny greenish flame, like a flower sprouting in a garden of darkness, marked the spot where the light had been. Tommy stared at it, until suddenly it became an eye—a pale, malignant eye, which gradually assumed the black, horrible body of a dream. He fell asleep at last with a sigh. His breathing became regular and heavy.

Outside, the wind hurled its volley of rain against the house; the shutters groaned and muttered to one another; the windowpanes seemed to weep great tears. And what of the poor little waif? Does he fear the shadows of the night? Does he wish companionship in the long, dark, weary hours? Does he long to have a little body like his own beside him now?

It seemed impossible, and yet why is he slipping noiselessly out of bed? Why is he crawling along the floor like a huge black spider? Why is he bending over Tommy so lovingly, so tenderly, so caressingly?

WHEN Dorothy and Mrs. Smithers entered the dining-room they found their parents already seated in their accustomed places—Mr. Arlington at the head of the board, Mrs. Arlington at the foot. It had often seemed to the younger girl that not merely a few feet of shining mahogany separated these two, but that it symbolized something else—possibly a great chasm of life that nothing could bridge; or the dividing line separating strength from weakness; success from failure.

Often she had stretched out her hands to them, attempting to draw them together, to make them as one—and always she had failed. Gradually as the years went by, she realized that nothing she could do would ever accomplish a mental union between these two; that without mutual understanding, loneliness is inevitable. If the one could know a single hour of weakness; if the other could know a single hour of strength, then this chasm might be bridged.

On this night, in particular, the contrast of character was mirrored on their faces to a marked degree. Mr. Arlington, just back from a day of triumph on the street, flushed with power, was especially square of jaw and keen of eye; Mrs. Arlington, after an ineffectual afternoon's sewing for charity, was especially faded out and wanlooking. They faced each other with the vague hostility of substance and shadow, of health and sickness, of matter and nerves.

"Late as usual, Dot," said the ogre of the house, frowning over his soup. "Do you think this is a hotel?"

"It was Tommy, father," broke in Mrs. Smithers; "he wouldn't go to sleep."

"Wouldn't go to sleep, eh? When I was a boy, if I didn't go to sleep when I was told, I was strapped till I did."

"Oh, John!" cried Mrs. Arlington faintly. "It isn't possible! How could you?"

"There was none of this namby-pamby business when I was a boy," he continued unheedingly. "Fathers were fathers then, and mothers were mothers. When a child

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stayed awake he was beaten; when he cried he was beaten; and when he laughed out loud he was beaten. A licking was the universal medicine then. But now how is it? Why, any nasty brat can raise a disturbance, can put a whole household topsy-turvy. It's a regular business with them. They howl, and get a stick of candy for shutting up. No wonder they do it—it pays."

"But Tommy isn't a nasty litle brat!" said Dorothy. "He's a dear, sweet-tempered child."

"He is a nasty little brat," said her father, giving her a bullying look. "He's a nasty, spoiled little brat. I should know. I'm his grandfather."

Dorothy was about to reply with heat when suddenly William appeared behind her chair and uttered a few low-spoken words that changed the topic of conversation.

"Hi begs pardon, Miss Dorothy," said he, "but the maid hasked me to hask you if you might be wantin' some of Master Tommy's hold clothes, what 'e's houtgrown. She 'as 'em in her trunk, ma'am, and she says as 'ow they'll fit the new baby."

In the lull that preceded the storm, Dorothy, mastering with difficulty her inclination to laugh, murmured. "Yes, William, have them brought up to the nursery. I'll put them on him tomorrow."

"How's this? What's this?" cried Arlington, leaning forward and regarding his younger daughter with a look of mingled amazement and suspicion. "What's this about babies, Dot?"

"It's a child that was left on the front stoop, John," said Mrs. Arlington. "I didn't know anything about it till William told me. Dorothy never tells me anything."

"Oh, mother, how could I?" cried Dorothy. "I didn't know where you were, and the poor little thing was all wet and shivering."

"And so you brought it in the house, Dot," continued Arlington, "instead of having William run out and get the nearest policeman? Well, I hope you called up the station at least. Have they sent for it yet?"

"No, I didn't call up the police station. He's going to stay here tonight, father," and Dorothy faced her irate parent fearlessly.

For a moment glance met glance and then Arlington, realizing that his foot nearly touched the invisible line beyond which he never went in opposing and tantalizing his daughter, veered around on another tack.

"And who left this little ragamuffin here?" said he.

"We don't know, Father," said Mrs. Smithers soothingly. "Probably his parents wanted to get rid of him. The poor little thing is deaf and dumb."

"Oh, I see!" cried Arlington. "His mother and father, heh? Well, that's natural enough. By the way, Dot, has your spring poet been here lately? I mean the little puppy I don't like—Hector McDonald."

"Yes, this afternoon. What of it?"

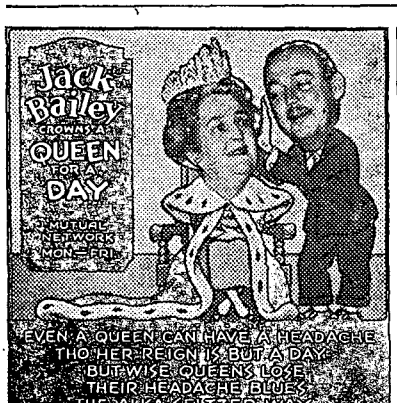
"Oh, nothing. This reminds me of him, that's all. It's his kind of humor. First he brings a parrot that can't talk, and then perhaps he brings a baby that can't talk."

"What do you mean, father?" cried Dorothy, rising to her feet. "What are you hinting at?"

But before Arlington could sidestep the issue in his usual adroit fashion, there came a slight sound to the ears of all four—a dull, jarring sound like the slamming of a heavy door.

"What was that?" cried Mrs. Arlington, starting nervously. "It sounded like the front door."

"It certainly did," said her husband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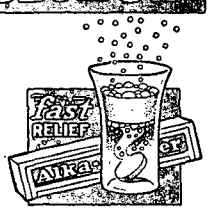

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grimly. "Go out into the hall, William, and see if anybody's there."

When the butler returned his face was as blank as a bare, whitewashed wall. "There's nobody there, sir," said he.

"Then somebody went out. Where are all the servants? It was one of them, I'll take my oath—going out by the front door, too, as though they owned the house! I'll have to look into this."

"They're hall downstairs, Mr. Harlington. Hi stopped to inquire, sir."

"Then what was that noise?"

"It's a 'orrible night houtside. The wind 'as risen, and a shutter 'as broke loose—that's what Hi think it was, sir."

"It may be so," said Arlington, gloomily sipping his coffee, "but I could have sworn it was the door." And, as he drank the steaming liquid, he looked about him at the windows, the doors, the curtains, for he was an intensely suspicious man, and any sudden noise that he could not explain caused him all manner of nervous worry.

Dorothy was the first to leave the table. Excusing herself, she hurried out into the hallway and up the great winding staircase. She intended going directly to her own room; but, when she reached the first landing, she noticed that Tommy's door was open, and wondered at it, remembering that she had closed it an hour before.

Somebody must have gone in there since then. But who? The servants were all downstairs, and the nurse was out. Perhaps the wind had blown it open. At any rate, she determined to see if everything was all right.

Dorothy pushed the door open and entered. The room seemed to be just as she had left it. At least the pale, flickering flame on the gas-jet, like some kind of tiny tongue lapping up the darkness, had not changed. But as she stood there, hesitating, she became conscious of a perceptible change in this room—a change in atmosphere perhaps—as though something that had lived here had suddenly gone away.

She stood beneath the gas-jet, listening to the silence of that gloomy little room. Outside, the shutters muttered to one another, the wind sang its everlasting chorus—but here, in the nursery, there was not a sigh or whisper, not even a long drawn breath.

With a quick, nervous gasp, Dorothy turned up the light. Across the room she could see Tommy, evidently fast asleep. Her eyes wandered to the other crib; she cried out in astonishment and fear.

The clothes were thrown back in disorder.

The bed was empty!

"Perhaps he has crept over to Tommy's crib and gone to sleep with him," she thought. Crossing the room quickly, she bent over her nephew. No, he wasn't there.

"Tommy," she whispered. "Wake up, dear."

She put her hand on his shoulder. He remained as motionless as a tiny waxen figure and his body felt cold to her touch. "Tommy," she cried nervously, "wake up! It's Aunt Dorothy! Don't be frightened, I—"

She hesitated and stopped. At that moment she saw that his face was unnaturally white, and that there was a great black bruise on his forehead.

What was this? She felt that her senses were leaving her.

By a great effort of will, she put her hand on the child's breast. His heartbeats were almost imperceptible.

"Help!" she cried. "Help!" And she fell fainting to the floor.

CHAPTER IV

UNCLE TOBIAS MEETS A BABY

MR. ARLINGTON sat alone in his library, staring blankly at the rows of books that encircled the room. It was very late, and the chill of morning was in the air. Unheeded, the fire had gone out long ago, and now the hearth was gray with ashes. From time to time this powdery substance stirred slightly, as though some buried thing were struggling there. On these occasions, the old man would move uneasily and stare at the open fireplace with something almost like terror in his eyes. But they would return to a dull contemplation of the books that lined the walls.

Like these books, Arlington's exterior told nothing of what lay within—nothing of the joy or sorrow, love or hate, that lay within. And this was a comfort to him now, as it had always been. This face of marble, these eyes of clouded glass, shut out the world so completely, warning off cruel sympathy, and crying aloud in a terrible voice, "Be off! There is no weakness here."

And none had come to him with their tears; none had sought him out to weep on his shoulder; not even Dorothy had come. So he was alone, yet thankful, be-

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cause he feared himself. Somewhere within him were weak womanly tears—an ocean of bitter, foolish tears.

And he feared these tears; he feared that they might take him off his guard and gush out of his eyes. This seemed a monstrous thing to Arlington—that he should weep, that he should ever feel the need to weep. It would change him somehow. It might chisel his face anew and wash the clouded eyes with tears.

An hour ago he had seen two strange men in the hallway—two men carrying leather bags. They were approaching Tommy's room with a businesslike methodical step. Looking at them, Arlington felt a terrible sensation—a sensation as though he had lost everything in the world. At that moment he felt that his grandson was going to die. It was as though a cold hand had been laid across his eyes.

Then very slowly, with clenched teeth and dragging feet, he had descended the stairs, and, entering the library, had closed the door carefully. For some time he had stood in the middle of the room, staring up at the ceiling. Once, thinking he heard a slight sound from above, he had clapped his hands to his mouth as though to imprison an escaping cry.

Now, as Arlington sat before the dead ashes, words which he had not heard for years echoed in his brain, echoed there and moved him strangely. Why should this phrase, "Suffer little children to come unto Me," affect him so? He had heard it before so many, many times. And then again, that other one, "The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." What was there in that to bring a lump in his throat and a mist before his eyes?

But now, quite suddenly, the old man realized the meaning of these wonderful words.

Yes, well might a loving God say to him, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me. From that cold, unfeeling breast, from that lack of understanding of the beautiful and pure, from the domineering authority of old age, fly to his loving heart, my children. See, these arms are open for you. They have been nailed thus, so that one day they might embrace the world. Come unto Me, My children. And, you, the desecrator, you who tread upon the flowers only to mourn them when they die, stand aside and suffer the little children to come unto Me. The Lord hath given to the undeserving, and the Lord hath taken away; therefore, I say, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

And with this knowledge of a supreme justice, with this realization of a supreme truth, the old man seemed to see himself as a stranger.

The fumes of his burning egotism blew away from his brain, and with them went all the forced firmness of that chiseled face of stone, all the coldness in those clouded eyes of glass. This man of ice was melting; yes, perhaps melting into tears. All alone in his gloomy library, these words, like a gentle breeze, seemed to stir the ashes in his heart, seemed to kindle there the flame that melted him into these tears:

"Suffer the little children to come unto Me," and, "The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Why had he steeled himself to kind emotions? Why had he made of his heart a secret chamber? Why had he never revealed it to his dear ones—not even to that tiny, childish form? And now it was too late. Yes, that was the pity of it—it was too late.

And this was terrible to the old man—this hopeless knowledge that Tommy might never know that his grandfather loved him, had always loved him. He might rush out into the night, he might cry aloud in the still air, but all this would mean nothing—nothing.

Arlington remembered the many times he had watched the child at play, the many opportunities he had missed to make his grandson love him.

Why had he warned off that warm little heart? Why had he shut himself out of the garden of the world—the garden where all the beautiful flowers grow, the flowers of affection for the little children? Yes, why had he done this thing?

False shame was at the bottom of it. All his life he had lived behind a mask, only to have it stripped from his face and to find himself a fool—yes, a fool, a fool who had been ashamed to show affection for a child.

Suddenly the library door opened. The old man started, and turned his head. Dorothy stood on the threshold, looking in at him. There were tears in her eyes, but a smile played about her lips.

"Tommy will live, father," she said. "Doctor Carter told me that he is out of danger."

"Thank God!"

The wind sighed down the chimney; the

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ashes trembled like a grieving human breast; Arlington still sat silent in his chair—yet the lamplight no longer fell on a face of marble and on eyes of clouded glass.

HECTOR McDONALD put his latchkey in the lock, turned it, and pushing the door open, stood aside. "Welcome to my humble home, Jim," he called back over his shoulder. "Come, step right in."

A tall, thin young man who had followed Hector like his shadow, now passed him and entered the shabby little room.

"You'll find a safe chair near the window," continued McDonald. "The other may be considered a delusion and a snare. I'll sit on the lounge myself. So now we're homelike and comfortable."

The thin young man availed himself of the proffered chair suspiciously, prodding it first with his finger and then sank cautiously on its faded velvet cushion. "Yes, it's all right," he said at last, after this careful test; and lolling back, he threw one bony leg over the other and clasped his hands behind his head.

The afternoon sunlight, streaming in through the window, fell full on his long yellow face, accentuating the hollows under his cheekbones, and resting in his eyeglasses, which in turn reflected little round patches of light on either cheek.

"Well, Mac," he said, "how's the world been treating you? Why is it that I find the Croesus of the campus living—you'll pardon the frankness—in this rat-hole? How have the mighty fallen?"

As he spoke, he changed his position in the chair like lightning, unclasped the fingers behind his neck and leaned forward expectantly with an almost feverish intensity. "Tell me," he repeated, "I want to know."

"Uncle Tobias disinherited me."

"Women or literature?"

"What do you mean, Jim?"

"The reason, of course. Why did Uncle Tobias disinherit you? Are temperate, well behaved young gentlemen disinherited for drunkenness? No. For other bad habits? No. Two things are left—woman and ambition. Which is it? Why was'e the English language?"

"Now I see what you're driving at. You're so quick that you take a man's breath away. It was my ambition—my literature—that did it."

"I see. Are you going to quit?"

"My writing? No, of course not."

"Are you going to starve?"

"Well, it looks very much that way, Jim. But for Heaven's sake take off those eyeglasses! You shouldn't wear them. They're not becoming. You didn't have them at college."

"No, I didn't. I'll take them off. Here, have a look at them. Do you see anything peculiar?"

McDonald took the eyeglasses from a hand that shot out like a released spring, and examined them carefully. Finally he put them on his nose, and peered through them at his friend. "Why, they're not at all powerful," he said.

"No, just plain glass. A dodge, a trick. Gives the intellectual look. Hides the expression in my eyes. Good to wear while examining witnesses."

"That's so, you're a full-fledged lawyer now. Have you had many cases?"

"None that I wanted. Stupid cases. A dog thief; a tipsy sailor for assault and battery. What fun is there in that? No wonder that lawyers lose imagination these days. All the clever criminals stay out of jail, and the trials aren't worth sitting through. Now there was the murder of old Glover in his conservatory. That looked promising. What happened? Nothing. The police bungled it, and we never had any trial. Then there was the case of Arlington's grandson and the disappearing baby. But, hello, what's the matter? You know something about that, eh?"

McDonald had started involuntarily at that familiar name, for it conjured up the memory of the last few months—the memory of what had followed Tommy's illness.

He seemed to see Dorothy as he had seen her on that day when he learned the news. How pale and sad she had been.

Since then he had tried in every way to cheer her, to wipe out of her mind the horror of that night, to make her forget a little of her grief. But all his attempts had failed; and once, finding her in an unguarded moment, he had learned the true reason why they had failed.

It was not a healthy sorrow that had made Dorothy what she was, that had changed her in an instant from a laughing girl into a silent, somber woman, that had robbed her of the buoyancy of youth—no, it was not a healthy sorrow, for it was mixed with a bitter portion of remorse and regret.

Calmly, almost coldly, she had told him that she blamed herself for what had happened; that she felt convinced that if she had not taken the baby in from the streets all this might never have happened.

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And although he had tried to persuade her differently, although he had struggled with this fixed idea, still, when he had left her he knew that he had failed.

"You know something of this, Mac?" continued the young lawyer, bending forward hungrily. "Tell me, now, I want to know."

"I don't know anything more about it other than was in the newspapers," said Hector wearily. "I happen to know the family, that's all."

"Which one in particular, Mac?"

"You're the damnedest man for seeking information I ever saw! What good could it possibly do to you to know? Well, if you must, it's Miss Dorothy Arlington."

"Engaged to her?"

"Yes—in a way."

"Father opposed to match?"

"Very much so, I imagine. Still, his character has changed lately."

"How changed? Since his grandson's sickness?"

"Yes; it affected him very much. No one suspected that he cared for the child. Certainly he never went out of his way to prove it. Yet Dorothy tells me he's all broken up. Several times she has found him crying in the library. If you knew him as well as I do, that would sound almost impossible."

"Remorse, regret. Watering his heart with tears. Flowers may grow there—but no clues. No clues to the robbery? No circumstantial evidence?"

"There's only one piece of circumstantial evidence that I know of," said Hector, "and as you are a friend of mine, I'll give it to you. Only one other person knows it, and probably she's forgotten. On the day of the robbery I was at Arlington's house. I was alone with Dorothy—talking about writing.

"Now, listen, Jim. I claimed that the only way to break into the magazines was by first breaking into jail. I said that if I strangled little Tommy or knocked Uncle Tobias over the head, I could sell every murder story that I had ever written. I suppose you'd call that circumstantial evidence, wouldn't you?"

"Strangled little Tommy," muttered the lawyer, drawing his cheeks in and then puffing them out—"strangled little Tommy! Did you say that, Mac?"

"Yes, Jim, those were my exact words," said McDonald.

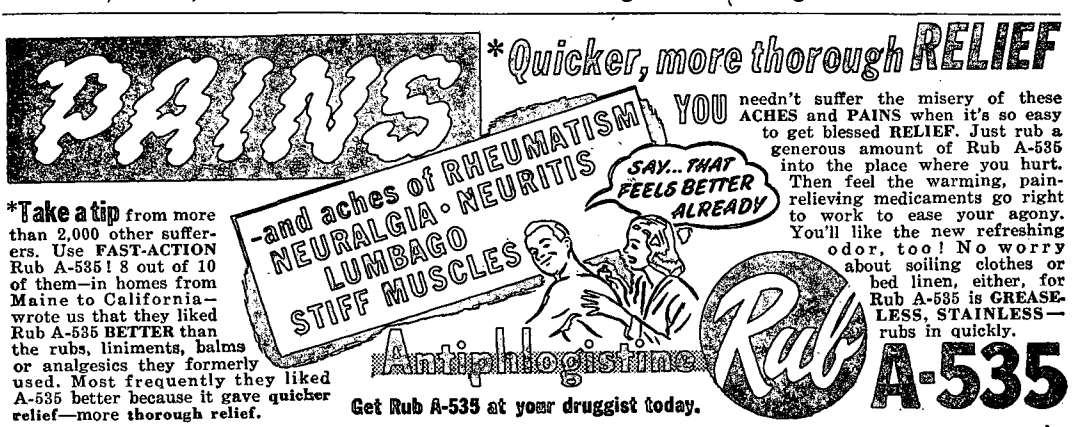
"Then let me give you a piece of advice. You don't want to be telling everybody you see. Men have been arrested for less than that. It shows that the idea was in your mind."

"It has been for a long time," said McDonald thoughtfully. "I don't mean the idea of murdering anybody, but the idea of being arrested for some crime that I had never committed—of causing a big stir in the papers—and then, at the trial, of being proved innocent on an alibi or something. It would be my making. I would be a literary light before I came out of jail."

"You're not the only one who has dreams," said the tall, thin man very slowly and distinctly. "I've had them myself. There's a hunch coming into my life some day that I'm going to play to the limit, even if I have to go it blind. There's a psychological moment in every man's life when, if he sees it, if he realizes it, he's bound to win. It's only a case of keeping your nerves tuned up to it, and I'm going to be sure that mine are. Common sense will never hold me back."

"The same old gambler you were at college, Jim."

"Yes; only now it's a bigger game. I'm not going in on every pot. I'm sitting tight, waiting for the right cards to come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around; and you bet I'll know when they come. But, Mac, I've got to be running along now. I'm mighty glad I ran into you on the street. Here's my card; you might need it; you're just the sort to get into trouble."

"I hope I do, Jim," said Hector, taking the proffered card and slipping it carelessly into his pocket. "I'll call on you then, never fear."

"Do it," said the tall young man, readjusting the eyeglasses on his bony nose and rising to his feet. "I wish you all the luck in the world with Miss Arlington; although I haven't got any time for the ladies myself. Too many really serious things to do. Well, I'm off. Good-by, Mac."

The two friends shook hands, and the lawyer passed out through the open door. For some time after he had gone McDonald sat lost in thought. Finally he pulled out the card and looked at it. On the little piece of pasteboard, under the name James Evans, was written in a small but legible hand:

"The only attorney in New York who believes in hunches."

"I wonder if he's right," McDonald muttered. "I wonder if every man in his life has that one hunch, that psychological moment when he can't lose? I haven't had mine yet, and it's getting time that I did."

UNCLE TOBIAS was very lonely in his big house. Even his collection of rubies failed to interest him as of old. He had gathered them in his many travels to as many different lands with the eagerness of a child collecting marbles, and each one could turn back the leaves of memory to different pages of the past. But now, for the first time, they had lain for many a night untouched in his safe. Perhaps Uncle Tobias was growing too old for either precious stones or marbles.

Since his last meeting with his nephew the old man had ruthlessly torn Hector out of his heart—or so, at least, he imagined. His pride had been wounded so deeply that the healing scab had formed very slowly and was in danger of being torn off at the slightest touch of memory.

Yet he was very lonely in his gloomy house. He missed an intangible something that he had always had. Perhaps it was a bright young face at the dinner table, or a clear voice filled to the brim with joyous youth.

Sometimes he caught himself wishing that Hector was home again—of course not the present Hector, who had insulted him on the street, but the Hector of long ago; the little boy with the light brown hair and dark blue eyes. He had enjoyed coming home in the afternoons; he had enjoyed sitting in the library and watching the child play; he had enjoyed the arguments Hector had with his nurse when bedtime came—yes, he had enjoyed all these things.

There was a picture of McDonald in the library, taken when he was at nursery age. He was dressed in a sailor suit and held a big rubber ball in his hand. One night Uncle Tobias stood before it with something like a lump rising in his throat. Suddenly a wave of anger passed through him, and, snatching up the picture, he threw it, frame and all, into the open fireplace. As luck would have it, the glass was not broken, and for the time being the likeness of the child's face lay on a bed of hot coals, smiling up at the old man with an innocent baby look of trust.

Uncle Tobias lifted his foot over it as though he were about to stamp it down beneath the burning ashes, then suddenly seized the tongs instead and drew it out to safety. The next day he went down to the city and bought a tiny golden frame.

Yes, it was very evident that Uncle Tobias was changing. Once he had been a man who, when he had decided on an action, carried out his decision immediately; but now he put things off from day to day.

For instance, there was the drawing up of his will. Like many men of good health, he had never contemplated death seriously. It had always been very distant—very remote from self. Then there had been no need of a will. Hector had been his only living relative, and what Uncle Tobias had would naturally go to him.

But now all this was changed. His health was not so good as it had been, and he very often felt tired after his walk. And then, coming home from the last meeting with his nephew, he had resolved to disinherit the young man immediately.

"I'll have a will drawn up tomorrow, leaving everything to charity," he told himself; but, like the proverbial tomorrow, this tomorrow never came. From day to day he put it off, till at last the word meant nothing to him.

And time passed very slowly for Uncle Tobias. The minutes in his lonely house dragged themselves to hours—hours that, in a straggling procession, crawled on into days. And the solitary man, finding his life an empty vault, longed for youthful companionship as only the old can.

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One bright spring afternoon Uncle Tobias, while on his accustomed walk, moved by a sudden spirit of adventure and exploration, turned off the beaten track and made his way into a more obscure part of the city. Returning by a side street toward Fifth Avenue, and looking about him more than was his custom, he noticed a baby carriage standing outside a small bird store.

Perhaps he was moved by curiosity, or some equally alien feeling; but certain it is that, as he passed the perambulator, he peered under the white canopy straight into two round, black eyes. There was something in the owlish solemnity of the little face, something in that steadfast, eager gaze, that pleased the old man's fancy.

Looking about him hastily to see if he was observed, and seeing no one, he retraced his steps and held out a long, bony finger to the child. For some time the baby stared abstractedly; and then, putting up a firm little hand, he seized it and smiled.

Uncle Tobias returned the smile.

"What's your name, my little man?" said he.

"Tweedle-dee," said the child.

HECTOR McDONALD had always been a scrupulously well-dressed young man. His was a soul that found outer expression in personal adornment; a soul that shuddered at a loud necktie; a soul that sought artistic blendings in the materialistic life about him.

When he saw a man wearing loud checks he said to himself, "Here is a fellow who has had a checkered career." And he was often right. When he met a man dressed in the best of taste he said to himself, "Here is a fellow with some artistic feeling." And he was very often wrong. The one gave full play to his character in a ready-made establishment; the other might very well have been toned down by environment and a tactful tailor's advice. It is generally a poor sheep that wears its sins on its back.

However, as has been said, Hector McDonald had always been a very well-dressed young man. In all his twenty-three years of life—up to the winter of adversity—not once had he appeared on the street in a garment undeserving the praise of a connoisseur of chappies. His hats had been invariably distingué; his collars well-fitting and spotless; his coat a creation of contours; his shoes bright reflectors of opulence. He abhorred shabbiness; and a frayed cuff, in those days, would have caused him more internal discomfort than a frayed conscience.

Yes, so he had been a few months before; but see how he has changed. We find great difficulty in recognizing this shabby figure, with dented derby and worn shoes, ragged coat and shapeless trousers, wandering through the byways of the city. How has this transformation taken place in so short a time? Could this be the same jaunty young man who first sauntered into these pages, so arrogant in the pride and hope of youth?

Yes, it is indeed the same. The articles of his extensive wardrobe have sought a summer of ease and are now hanging haughtily among their inferiors in a dingy little shop around the corner.

One by one his prejudices and niceties have melted away before the winter snow. Nature has put her hand on the young man's arm and has conducted him to the pawnshop. He has sacrificed the outer in the inner man; he has preferred to line his stomach rather than his overcoat. It has been a bitter lesson, but he has learned it well.

Yet why was it necessary to throw everything overboard? Surely he might have found a brush for his hat, or some polish for his shoes. A needle and thread might have worked wonders with that torn sleeve. Then why has everything gone to rack and ruin?

Because Hector McDonald never did anything by halves. When he was a young man of fashion there were none who outdid him, none who so delighted a Fifth Avenue tailor's heart. And now there were none who outdid him in shabbiness, dinginess, and lack of personal pride.

Why have a spotless derby when there's a ragged collar and greasy ties beneath it? Why brush one's shoes when there's a fringe of muddy cloth above them? Surely it was more artistic to let all go to rack together. It offended the eye, certainly, but not so much as any forced contrast might do.

And now Hector McDonald shunned his old paths.

He slunk through the byways of the city, dreading to meet some friend of happier days. Beneath his exterior of wretchedness lurked a great sensitiveness for his sorry plight, a sensitiveness perhaps the more acute because of his former taste in dress.

He felt that he was a sore on the face of humanity, an acquaintance that might be greeted with shame.

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He had grown morbid on the subject, and had even given up seeing Dorothy. There were letters from her lying on his table at home—letters asking him to call; tearful letters, almost begging him to call. Reading them, he had said to himself, "How can I?"

And looking at his ragged reflection in the mirror on the bureau, he muttered, "I can't go like this—perhaps that story will be accepted, and then I'll go." But the story had not been accepted, and time was pressing.

Spring had arrived.

Then whom did Hector visit, since his cowardly pride kept him from people of his own caste? At one place only he called almost daily. He sat every afternoon in the bird store, talking to the kind old lady, the old lady with the snowy ringlets, ringlets that rustled gently when she shook her head.

Yes, Mrs. Blake interested him greatly. She was never quite the same, except when little Willie was in the room. The child seemed to hold her to the normal. When he had been wheeled out to the pavement in front of the store, as he often was on these warm spring days, the old lady's natural queerness asserted itself—the touch of insanity that Hector guessed was there. She was like a ship sailing before the wind. As long as the helmsman was at the tiller she was steady as a rock; but as soon as he let go of it and stepped away, everything went mad.

Coming up into the face of a gale of fancy, every sail that had helped her on her course now flapped about in wild disorder. Little Willie was this helmsman, and Hector thought that he steered with the hand of love.

And yet he liked her best when "The Silent One" was in his baby carriage on the street. What strange thoughts she had at these times.

Leaning forward, she would whisper these thoughts into his ear—thoughts that, like tongues of flame, seemed to light up a wild, wind-tossed land of imagination—to light it up for but an instant and then to quickly die away.

One day he found her in a different mood. To his astonishment, without the slightest warning, she picked up her knitting and began to tear it into shreds, crying out against the drudgery of life.

"I didn't come into the world for this," she whispered, putting her lips close to McDonald's ear. "See that piece of paper there—out in the street, I mean? See how gay it is, dancing along, singing along! Ah! that's happiness, that's freedom—with the wind at your back! I want to be like that piece of paper some day, and let the wind take me over the meadows. Why, even the clothes on the line know him for their friend; the poor, strangled clothes. How they struggle to follow him—how they strike out with their arms and legs to get away! Oh, it's pitiful—pitiful! It brings the tears to my eyes. But I'm tired of sitting still when there's so much to do out there with the wind!"

"And little Willie? What would become of him?" asked Hector.

At that the agitated face of the old lady calmed as though by magic; her curls ceased to rustle, and her large, wandering eyes sought the window.

"I must bring him in," she said in a quiet, resigned voice; "he'll be angry if I don't."

She was silent for a moment, and then cried out in surprise:

"Why, there's the old gentleman again!"

HECTOR McDONALD peered out above the row of parrot cages at the wicker baby carriage standing by the door. For a moment he was speechless with astonishment. There, in front of little Willie, bending over the child with a long, bony finger held out in greeting, was none other than Uncle Tobias.

Yes, Uncle Tobias, from his shining boots to his shining high hat—Uncle Tobias, with a strange smile on his once frigid face.

McDonald watched his relative for a time, in a kind of dumb amazement. The old man, unconscious of being observed, bent still lower, and actually allowed little Willie to seize him by his pointed beard. Then, drawing away shamefacedly, Uncle Tobias put his hand in his pocket, and, pulling out a toy wrapped in tissue paper, presented it to the child. Little Willie, with a gurgle of infantile delight, seized the treasure; and the old man, with another smile, petted the little white hand and passed on.

"Well, I'll be damned!" cried Hector at last.

"Why, what's the matter, Mr. McDonald?"

"Do you know who that old chap is? That's Uncle Tobias, the man who turned me out of his house. You remember my telling you about it?"

"Oh, is it?" cried the old lady. "How glad little Willie would be if he knew that. He's very fond of him as it is, and the old

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gentleman thinks a lot of Willie. He comes here most every day and brings the child something. He must be awfully wealthy, Mr. McDonald?"

"As wealthy as Solomon," said Hector. "But this is a new dodge of his—taking to babies. How long has it been going on, Mrs. Blake?"

"It was about two weeks ago that I noticed him first, sir. Since then he's passed almost every day. I was thinking that maybe he would like to adopt Willie."

"You can't tell what he'll do," said Hector a trifle bitterly. "He turned me out, and now he's liable to bring somebody else in and make him his heir. That would be his idea of revenge. But you wouldn't part with Willie, would you, Mrs. Blake?"

"What size shoes do you wear?" asked the old lady, with her eyes on the baby carriage.

"Seven. Why?"

"Then you see that little Willie couldn't fill your shoes. But look!"

Her eyes left the perambulator as she spoke and became fixed on the piece of paper that was still flying about the street in the strong March breeze. It would remain perfectly motionless for a moment—as though gathering its strength—and then, running along the pavement with a rustling sound, it would finally bound up into the air.

"See how happy it is!" whispered the old lady, while a strange glitter stole into her large, luminous eyes. "How happy it is, playing with the wind all day. And I must sit here hour after hour, knitting!"

Suddenly she put her lips to Hector's ear, so that he felt her hot breath fanning his cheek.

"If it wasn't for him"—and she nodded toward the tiny figure through the glass—"if it wasn't for him, I'd be with it now. I'd wander through the world as I've often longed to do; I'd dance in the moonlight, and chase the wandering shadows home.

"He lied to me! He said that we should take Adventure by the hand, and that she would lead us; that we should fly along like the wind; that we should go out into the world as to a dance! Lies! Lies! All lies!

"Adopt him? I wish the devil in hell would adopt him—and Cousin Harry, too! They have me between them, body and mind.

"What can the voice do then? Can it leave the body and mind? No. It is doomed to constant slavery. But the wind calls to me, and sooner or later I shall go. Sh! Sh! He will hear me. His ears are so sharp! Look at him now!"

McDonald's eyes followed those of the crazed old lady. He saw that indeed little Willie had changed his position in the baby carriage. He now sat facing them—staring stolidly through the glass.

"Sh!" whispered the old lady. "Sh!" And then in a louder tone, "So you wear size seven shoes, Mr. McDonald?"

"YOU have lied to me always, Tweedledee."

It was Mrs. Blake who spoke. She was seated in her accustomed place beside the window. Her knitting lay neglected in her lap, her large luminous eyes wandered aimlessly about the room. She seemed trying to avoid the sharp, penetrating glance of her nephew.

Little Willie sat up very straight in his wicker baby carriage, his black, beady eyes narrowed into two evil slits, his plump hands clenched into tiny fists.

"So I have lied to you, Echo?" piped the child. "Hear our Echo, Hercules."

Cousin Harry, who was kneeling before a box of carpenter's tools, lifted his eyes to the child's face. "He has dared to tell my master that he lies?" he muttered.

Mrs. Blake leaped to her feet with surprising agility. Her long thin face began to work convulsively; her eyes rolled up till they seemed to be white and sightless.

"Yes, Tweedledee," she cried, "you have lied to me—always you have lied! Once you told me that we should go out into the world as to a dance; that we should take Adventure by the hand; that I should be free—free like the wind. But has it come to pass? Ah, no! I am forced to sit here day after day—an old woman, knitting! In the circus I had more liberty; there I had the kind, wooden demon who told me what to do."

Cousin Harry rose to his full height. "Echo," he said menacingly, "do not speak so to Tweedledee."

But Mrs. Blake continued unheedingly, "Yes, you have lied to me. You have taken advantage of poor Echo, who has never wished you any harm. At night you have shown him drops of blood; before the morning they have crystallized into precious stones.

"Blood is precious—precious! That is why nature hides it so carefully beneath our skins. Each drop will turn into a garnet, or ruby, if it is rich enough.

"When Hector McDonald's uncle left this morning, you whispered in my ear, 'That

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man has the rarest rubies flowing through his veins.' How could you know that, Tweedledee?"

The child frowned impatiently. "Be silent, Echo."

"No, I will not be silent. I am the voice, and I shall speak.

"You have stolen my kind little wooden demon, and you will not give him back to me. Without him, I cannot understand you, Tweedledee. Why did you ask me to find out what size shoes McDonald wears? I am afraid for him, Tweedledee.

"I would not have you take a single drop of his blood—no, not if it turned into the most sparkling ruby in all our treasure chest.

"Why is Hercules making stilts? Ah, you will not answer me!

"I smell blood! It is coming—coming in a torrent of precious stones. But I am tired of precious stones. They are cold and sharp. They weigh me down beneath their wicked weight—like a bag full of crimson pebbles. They no longer sparkle in the sunshine of a happy thought. They glow, glow as sullen and red as the dying sunset. Because of them, I will no longer obey you, Tweedledee."

"What, you will no longer obey our master!" cried the giant.

He strode over to Mrs. Blake.

One of his huge hairy hands gripped her throat. "I will wring your neck—so," he growled, tightening his grasp. "Say the word, Tweedledee, and this voice shall be silent forever."

But the child shook his small, round head. "No, no, Hercules. Echo still has work to do. Not yet—not yet!"

ONE bright spring day in the latter part of April, Hector McDonald left the dingy little room on Thirty-Fourth Street for the last time. That morning the rent was due; and the young man had found himself in an embarrassing, penniless condition.

Nothing remained to take to the pawnshop—nothing, with the exception of the gold-headed cane that had belonged to his father.

This McDonald had reserved as a last resource, hoping to raise enough money on it to pay his way out of the city. Finding himself at the end of his rope, he had determined on this course of action after careful deliberation. Surely in a suburban town he could find work more readily than in this overcrowded money market.

Besides, if he had to buckle down to commercialism, it was better to go to some place where he was unknown; where his literary ambitions and failures could not be ridiculed and he himself exposed to that cutting, embittering phrase, "I told you so."

On this sunshiny afternoon, he presented a strange figure to the passer-by; a figure that could scarcely have been recognized by any of his former friends.

Walking along the street with an unsteady step, the young man appeared like the shadow of his former self. Even his mustache had that despondent droop peculiar to warriors defeated by life. It seemed to be trying to conceal the weary corners of his mouth.

His shabby clothes were too large for him; and his derby was pushed down on his head, as though it wished to hide those hunger-haunted eyes with its ragged brim. Only the cane in his hand—the cane with the bright golden head that glittered in the sunshine—bore the marks of worldly affluence and, like the figures on a counterfeit bill, made what carried it appear more miserable by comparison.

McDonald had not eaten for forty-eight hours; and feeling very dizzy, he leaned on his cane as he walked along. Everything seemed strange and distorted to him.

The long line of houses on either side drew together at the farther end of the street like giants whispering secrets to one another; the passing people were walking either too slow or too fast; the trolley-cars ran independent of their tracks and threatened the curbs; and, last of all, he felt a strange inclination to burst out into song.

"Come," he said to himself, "this will never do. I must pull myself together. I've felt this way before after dining too well; but when I haven't dined at all, it's ridiculous. Why does a poor man drink, when to starve is so much less expensive? Ah, there's the parrot shop at last! Don't elude me, friendly doorknob—ah, I have you—and I'll proceed to twist your neck!"

When Hector entered the bird store he heard the old lady's voice issuing from the room in the rear. Approaching, he found the door ajar, and saw a sight through the aperature which quite convinced him that his faculties were not to be relied upon.

There, in the middle of the tiny room, with a dropping head to escape the ceiling, stood Cousin Harry, grown at least a foot taller in a single day—or so thought Hector—while Mrs. Blake sat in one corner, an interested spectator, clapping her hands

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together from time to time and crying out in a shrill voice, "Well done, Hercules, well done!"

As McDonald stood there, wild-eyed with astonishment, the giant started walking about the room, and every time he made a step forward the young man heard a wooden thud. Finally he glanced at Cousin Harry's feet, and realized the truth with a sigh of relief. What he saw was not beyond the scope of reason, after all.

The giant had not grown a foot taller in a single night. No, he was merely standing on stilts—peculiar stilts that ended in little wooden feet that resembled boot-trees.

"For Heaven's sake!" cried Hector. "What's this, Mrs. Blake?"

The old lady started violently and turned toward the open door; while Cousin Harry wheeled about so suddenly that he almost lost his balance, and only regained it by a quick lurch forward.

"Why these stilts?" continued McDonald. "Isn't he tall enough without them?"

"Oh, it's you," said the old lady. "What a start you gave me! It's only Cousin Harry practising."

"Practising for what?"

"Practising? Why, practising to walk on stilts, of course."

"But why? What for?"

"Well, you see, it's this way," said Cousin Harry slowly and laboriously, like a stupid child repeating a lesson. "I've got a chance to join a circus and be the giant in the side show. In the parade through the streets, they want me to be eight feet tall. I'm not quite big enough to suit some of them, so I'm learning to walk on these things. They won't know the difference when I get shoes on."

"Oh, I see," said Hector. And then, turning to the old lady, "Where is the Silent One? Is he going to join the circus, too?"

"Who? Willie? Oh, no, sir! He's been adopted. The old gentleman sent for him this morning. What a fine new home he's got! I took him over myself. What a beautiful garden your uncle has under his library windows! Willie is sleeping in the library until a nursery is fixed up for him. He can smell the flowers when the window's open. It's beautiful, beautiful."

"Who adopted him?" cried Hector. "Not Uncle Tobias?"

"The very same, sir. He called on me the other day, and was so kind and pleasant-spoken. 'I like that baby, Mrs. Blake,' said he. 'Let me have him, and I'll guarantee to provide for him all his life. I'll bring him up like a gentleman, Mrs. Blake.' What could I do, then? I couldn't stand in litle Willie's way, even if I do love the child and hate to have him leave me."

Hector remembered the day when the old lady had stared so intently through the shop windows at the flying piece of flying paper, and had expressed such a different attitude toward little Willie; but now he very wisely held his tongue. Anything she said at any time, he reasoned, was merely the mad impulse of the moment. Yesterday she had been quite mad; today she was quite sane—and so it was with this strange old lady.

"You look sick and worn out, sir," she continued in a motherly fashion. "Won't you have some tea and toast? I was just going to make some when you came in."

"I haven't had anything to eat in two days," said Hector, sinking down on the lounge. "I'm kind of dizzy, Mrs. Blake."

"Good Heavens! Take off those stilts, Harry, and make a fire in the stove. Why haven't you eaten anything, Mr. McDonald?"

"All my money's gone," answered Hector simply. "The last of it went Tuesday. I was on my way to the pawnshop with this cane; but I felt too weak, and so I thought I'd drop in here and rest for a moment."

"And rest you shall, sir. Take off those shoes and lie down on the sofa. You'll be more comfortable there. That's the way. Take those shoes and clean them, Harry. They're not in very good shape, sir. Why did you put these nails in the sole of this one? They make a cross, don't they? That's strange!"

"Yes," said Hector drowsily. "You see, the sole was coming off—was deserting me in my time of need—so I tacked it on with a cross of nails for luck."

BY THIS TIME Cousin Harry had taken off his stilts, and, rolling up his trousers about his enormous ankles, he proceeded to make himself useful. First he took Hector's shoes out of the room, and, coming back immediately, busied himself over the stove.

Soon the kettle was steaming, and a small sirloin steak was in process of cooking; while McDonald, lying back at his ease, breathed the odor of food delightedly through his nostrils, and forgot the trials and tribulations of the past in an animal anticipation of the future.

Finally everything was in readiness. Cousin Harry pulled a small, round table in front of the lounge, and the old lady

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placed on it a napkin, knife, and fork, and last of all, the steaming steak itself.

"Now, sir," said she, "you can begin." But her invitation was unnecessary, for McDonald, quite changed from his old, fastidious self, literally pounced on the meat and eagerly devoured it like a hungry wolf.

"This is awfully kind of you, Mrs. Blake," said he at last, looking up from the plate on which nothing remained but a few bones and red splashes of gravy. "That steak was wonderful! You must excuse me if I've acted like a cannibal!"

"Poor boy," said the kind old lady, and there was genuine solicitude in her eyes—"poor boy, you were hungry. Now you must have your tea and toast. See, they're all ready for you."

Hector, nothing loath, drank the warming beverage as though it were nectar, and devoured at least a dozen pieces of toast. Then, feeling very drowsy, he let himself fall back on the lounge and closed his eyes.

"That's right," said the old lady; "try to get a litle sleep if you can. I'll tell Cousin Harry not to wake you when he comes in with your shoes." With her finger to her lips, she tiptoed out of the room.

And then McDonald felt himself carried away in the swift, silent river of sleep.

It came suddenly and swept him off, bearing him to the drowsy sea of dreams. Even in a half-conscious condition, he realized that this sleep was unnatural, and struggled against it weakly; but he found the tide too strong for him and the shore of wakefulness too far away.

It was as though a heavy black curtain had fallen before his eyes; as though he were lying beneath a mountain of soft, downy feathers. He could neither struggle nor cry out. He was helpless. Once the black curtain lifted a trifle, and it was then that he had this strange dream, which perhaps, in reality, was no dream:

He seemed to be looking at the objects in the room through halfclosed eyes. There were the empty dishes on the table, the kettle on the stove, and the old clock ticking out the seconds. Cousin Harry was gone, but the kind old lady was here. What was she doing?

Ah, she was rummaging in a box beside the window. Now she was drawing out of it a little figure—a little figure of wood. Now she was placing it on the mantelpiece. What could it be? Why, it had feet like a goat, and the head of an old man! See! She is on her knees before it with outstretched arms. But why is her voice so filled with joy?

"Oh, I've found you! I've found you!" cried the old lady, while tears ran down her cheeks. "I've found my brain!"

And then a strange thing happened. The litle figure sitting on the mantelpiece—the little wooden figure with legs like a goat and the face of an old man—spoke.

"I have your brain," it squeaked, "and you have me. Ask, and I must answer. Tweedledee has led you into strange paths since last we met, my master."

"Strange paths," echoed the old lady in a voice like a sob.

UNCLE TOBIAS stole into his library like a thief. It was past nine o'clock, and the room was a den of shadows.

Walking on his toes to the little table in the corner, he lighted the reading-lamp, and then approached the wicker baby carriage standing a few steps from the open window. Bending down, he could just make out the black outline of a tiny, round head against the snowy pillow. The eyes appeared to be closed, and the breathing was deep and regular.

"He's asleep," muttered the old man; and drawing his chair noiselessly to the casement, he sat down and rested his chin on his hand.

It was a beautiful May night. Outside, directly below the window, his tiny garden lay dreaming through the dark hours. The perfume of its sleeping breath caressed his cheek.

Above, that other garden of immensity, the sky, was alive with star-flowers. They pushed their golden heads through the rich, black soil on invisible stalks; and the breeze, coming from them, seemed to bring their fragrance to the world.

What were the old man's thoughts on this night? Was he happy? Who can tell?

Perhaps he had conjured up another Hector McDonald when he had looked at the sleeping child. Very often our human weakness takes the form of forced affection. We lose a precious something and try to supplant it by another, driving the old love through new channels of the heart. But is it ever quite the same? Can we take back a gift from one and present it to another with all the pleasure-giving joy of something new?

For weeks he had been contemplating this step; for weeks he had been passing by the little shop; for weeks he had seen this baby almost daily—and yet, during all that time, he had hesitated to take

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something new to fill his nephew's place.

But having once decided, he had acted firmly. He had talked the matter over with the sensible old woman who kept the store.

He had expected trouble here—weak, womanly tears—perhaps feigned affection for the child, calculated to open his purse; but he had been wrong.

Everything had gone quite smoothly. The sensible old woman had proved to be very sensible indeed; some might have said unfeeling. No sooner had he explained to her his position in life, no sooner had he offered to adopt the child, to make himself responsible for its upbringing, than any objections she might have had were put aside. She had given up her nephew without a sigh, without a tear, but with perhaps just the slightest trace of an enigmatic smile about the lips.

He had sent for his new possession that morning, and it had been brought, in due course, safe and sound. A baby in the house needs thought and preparation. Uncle Tobias had neglected both.

Very much to his annoyance, he had been unable to secure a nurse immediately, although one had promised to come on the following day. Luckily, his cook was familiar with children, and had taken little Willie under her wing. Then there was the nursery that had been neglected for so many years.

The servants had been working in it all day, but it was not quite ready for its new occupant. The child was to spend the first night in the library. He had been kissed, and told to go to sleep, hours ago; and yet Uncle Tobias, like a baby with a new doll, could not resist watching him as he slept.

At last the old man stirred in his chair and, rising stiffly to his feet, tiptoed to the safe. It was a long time since he had taken the rubies out for their nightly inspection; and now, perhaps wishing to retrace his footsteps into the path of bygone habit, he noiselessly opened the steel door and took out a small leather bag. Walking over to the reading-lamp, he heard a faint clicking as the stones rubbed against each other; and his eyes lighted up with anticipation as they had used to do.

Under the shaded light, he poured the rubies on the table. They pattered down on the hard, smooth surface like crimson hail.

How they glittered, lying there! Each one seemed to light up a story of the past. Perhaps they had seen a bloody past.

This one had, at any rate. He remembered the man who had sold it to him, the man with the brooding face and flowing robes; he remembered the little shop of dark shadows and Eastern hangings. It was by such a man, in such a room, that such a story should be told.

Then he started suddenly.

There, sitting bolt upright, he saw a tiny form—a tiny form with a shadowy face and black, beady eyes. It had risen from the pillow as silently as a well-oiled spring, and now sat staring with a glittering intensity at the glittering pile of blood-red stones beneath the lamp.

And Uncle Tobias, at that moment, fancied that the face of the child had changed; that he could see this change even through the shadows; and that it had grown older—years older.

The tiny hands gripping the sides of the carriage seemed thin and eager, and the eyes held something in their depths quite foreign to innocence.

For an instant the two remained as motionless as statues; the old man looking at the child; the child staring at the stones. Finally Uncle Tobias shook off his weird fancy and broke the silence.

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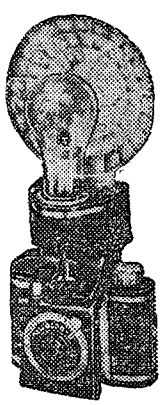

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dee. You ought to be asleep," he said.

The child's body relaxed; he turned his eyes toward Uncle Tobias. They were partly veiled now by black, drooping lashes. Suddenly he stretched out his arms and smiled. "I wants the pretty stones!" he cried. "Oh, please, the pretty, pretty stones!"

"Will you go to sleep if I let you play with them for a minute?"

"I'll go right to sleep then."

The old man, now quite himself, smiled benignly, and gathering the rubies into the leather bag, deposited them beside his tiny protégé. The child seemed delighted with his expensive playthings. Taking them up one by one, he held them to the light, twisted them around and around in his chubby little fingers, put them between his lips like cherries, and gurgled his infantile delight.

For some time Uncle Tobias stood over the baby, enjoying his play. It reminded him of other nights and other children.

Finally, almost reluctantly, he said, "Well, you've played enough, and now you must go to sleep."

Taking the rubies with him, the old man returned to his seat by the table. As for the child, his obedience was of the best. Without a word of protest, he sank back on the pillows; and a few moments later his regular breathing showed him to be in the land of dreams.

Time passed, and the old man examined the rubies one by one—the treasured collection of a lifetime—while through his brain events thronged on hurrying, echoing feet, calling up a host of long forgotten faces—a host of long forgotten thoughts.

Gradually the footsteps died away; the forgotten faces grew gray with mist; the distant thoughts, folding their tired wings, became shadowy and unreal. Sleep was stealing over Uncle Tobias.

Slowly the gray head sank lower and lower, till the wrinkled forehead touched the table and was still. The wan, white hands lay open on the glittering heap of precious stones; a single ruby, like a drop of blood, touched the pointed beard.

It grew later still; and slowly, like a tiny ghost, a figure all in white stole out of a shadow near the wall, and creeping to the window on all fours, raised itself—then lifted its arms above its head. For a moment it stood thus, as though listening to the night, while behind it, in the silent room, the lamplight was dying out—dying out in a fretful, flickering flame.

Suddenly a moonbeam glided in and, shuddering, touched these black, lackluster eyes. And then, as though this were a signal, that which this silent little figure had been waiting for came to pass.

Slowly, outside the window, a glittering object was pushed up from below—an object resembling a black cane with a golden head. Quickly, eager little hands seized it and pulled it in.

Now other hands grasped the ledge—great, straining, hairy hands—and in a moment more the stars had vanished, wiped out by the huge body of a man. Two forms complete in contrast approached Uncle Tobias—the one small and dangerous, the other gigantic and terrible.

Now they were beside him; now they were bending over him; now the tiny figure, loosening his hold on the cane, handed it to the other. And if the light had been brighter, if we could have seen Tweedledee's face, I am sure it would have worn a ferocious yet pathetic smile.

CHAPTER V

"IT'S COME AT LAST"

THE HOUR HAND on the face of the slow-ticking clock had made a complete revolution before Hector McDonald awoke. During the night people had come and gone about him.

Many times the kind old lady had stolen in noiselessly, and, drawing her chair beside the couch, had regarded the sleeping young man with a searching yet tender glance. On these occasions her large, luminous eyes mirrored both maternal regard and genuine pity.

She seemed a mother grieving over the sickbed of her only child.

Once, late in the night, Cousin Harry had stalked into the little room, carrying in his arms what appeared to be several pieces of broken wood. He had bent over the stove with his burden, and, a little later, a red, evil flame had leaped up like a bloody, silent tongue.

At that moment the giant had been outlined against the fierce light, and his shadow had enveloped the sleeping figure on the couch.

Morning had come and gone and the afternoon was well advanced before McDonald awoke. Rubbing his eyes, he sat up and stretched himself. He usually came out of sleep like a bather out of a cold plunge, strengthened, refreshed, and invigorated. But this time it was quite different.

His head ached frightfully, and his body

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Hercules' huge body landed on stocking feet in the middle of the room, and the dwarf stood turned to stone. . . .

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felt heavy as lead. Every movement required an exertion of the will; his eyes were so misty that he seemed to be looking out at the world through a fine, gray veil.

"I wonder how long I've been asleep?" he muttered, looking about him vacantly. "The sun is still up, I see."

"You've had a long, long sleep, Mr. McDonald," said the old lady; and glancing toward the window, he saw her sitting in her accustomed place with her knitting on her knee.

"But I couldn't have been sleeping so very long, Mrs. Blake. I didn't get here until four, and I see by your clock that it's only six."

"It was yesterday that you came, sir."

"What! And I've been sleeping all that time?"

"Exactly. You were very tired."

"I must have been. Why, I never slept as long as that before. Why didn't you wake me up? I must have bothered you, lying here."

"Bothered me? Oh, no, sir," said the old lady, with a bright smile. "You were no more bother to me than a corpse, and they're no bother to me, Mr. McDonald. Except when they bleed," she added in an undertone, and her expressive face darkened.

The young man shivered involuntarily. His nerves were throbbing to the winds of fancy. And there was something in Mrs. Blake's eyes, something in her voice, something in the way she held her head, that affected McDonald more than any of her wildest mental wanderings had ever done.

He longed to get out into the street and let the spring breeze blow the clouds out of his brain; to leave this tiny, close room and this madwoman—this madwoman, with her white, rustling hair and nervous gliding fingers.

"Where are my shoes, Mrs. Blake?" he asked. "I must go. There are several things that I've got to do."

"So you're in a hurry?" she said, rising to her feet. "Isn't it strange that you should be in a hurry?" She looked at him for a moment in astonishment, and then repeated in almost a whisper, "Isn't it strange that he should be in a hurry?"

"You see, I've got several things to do," said the young man quickly, looking about him on all sides. "Can you find my shoes for me, Mrs. Blake?"

The kind old lady walked out of the room, and returned a moment later with McDonald's shoes. They had been brushed and polished. As she handed them to the young man, her face was transformed into a mask of sorrow; bright tears gathered in her eyes.

"And why do you want these shoes?" she asked softly.

"Because they're mine," said Hector wearily. "It's a custom to wear shoes these days, Mrs. Blake, and we're all creatures of custom, you know."

"But these shoes!" said the kind old lady, shaking her head at him, while a tear trickled down her long, slender nose. "These black, treacherous shoes!"

At another time Hector might have burst out laughing; but now, in his state of nervous depression, the whole atmosphere of the tiny room seemed charged with insanity.

He felt that if he took a long breath madness might enter with it, and he would be repeating with her, "These shoes; these black, treacherous shoes!" He must leave here immediately.

Hastily putting on his shoes, he started for the door. The old lady followed him, muttering in a broken voice, "Those shoes; those black treacherous shoes!"

Before leaving the bird store, the young man turned with an outstretched hand. The memory of Mrs. Blake's kindness for a moment overcame the fanciful terrors in his mind. He blushed for his brusqueness.

"Good-by, Mrs. Blake," he said. "Perhaps it will be a good many days before you see me again. I'm going to leave the city tomorrow. I'm bound for the country, where everything is bright and happy, where the wind plays through the meadows—you know, your friend, the wind, Mrs. Blake."

"And you would like to play with the wind?" cried the old lady, clasping her hands together and peering at him through tear-dimmed eyes. "You would like to be gay and free like that—so free, like the wind? Dancing before it always, over the meadows bright with flowers; over the hedges green and gold; over the brook that sings in the sunlight; over the river pale from the moon—on, on, always on, to the rest at the end of the world! Oh, have pity on me! I'm so sad, so very sad!" And burying her face in her slender hands, she sobbed as though her heart would break.

McDonald, not knowing quite what to do, leaned forward and patted her reassuringly on the shoulder.

At that very moment the fast-waning day shot one of her departing arrows through the window, straight into the

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young man's face. His forehead was stained a vivid crimson; and the old lady, seeing it between her trembling fingers, dropped her hands to her throat.

"Wipe it off!" she screamed. "Wipe it off before the people see! It's Tweedledee that's done this. Wipe it off!"

And drawing a handkerchief from her pocket, she rubbed feverishly at the splash of crimson sunlight, muttering between pale, trembling lips, "Wipe it off! It's Tweedledee's mark; so wipe it off!"

WHEN Hector McDonald left the bird store, he was still in a kind of mental stupor. The dregs of his prolonged, unnatural sleep were with him yet, and the misty veil still hung before his eyes.

Perhaps it was this mental state, or perhaps it was his anxiety to leave the mad, old woman, that had made him quite forget his one means of procuring money, the heavy gold-headed cane.

At last he remembered it, and stopped short. He half turned about, as though to retrace his footsteps; but as he stood there, hesitating, all his fanciful fears returned, and his nerves began to throb.

He felt that in his present state of mind it would be impossible to return. He must wait until nature dusted the cobwebs from his brain. It would be horrible for him to go back now—to look into those large, wandering eyes—at that white, nervous face—at those feverish, moving lips—to hear that insane voice whispering in his ear, "Wipe it off! I say, wipe it off! It's Tweedledee's mark; so wipe it off!"

No, that was more than he could do at present. Besides, the cane would be safe where it was—quite safe. He would go and say good-by to Dorothy, and afterward he would call for it.

McDonald continued up the street, and gradually, as he walked along, his brain grew clearer. Fixing his mind on the future, his natural buoyancy reasserted itself, and he began to build air castles.

An ordinary house rarely meets the demands of a dreamer, especially a ragged dreamer, and thus we have the air castle—an abode constructed by optimism to contain everything or nothing—a floating dream-dwelling resting on a cloud—a drifting houseboat on a sea of immensity.

So engrossed was Hector in his thoughts that he saw nothing about him. The hurrying people might have been so many ghosts.

There was a policeman standing on the corner who seemed interested in the young man. Perhaps if he had seen this policeman's face, perhaps if he had glanced at that open mouth, those staring eyes, at the bristling astonishment depicted by that white mustache, he would have spoken to him instead of hurrying on.

As McDonald walked by him, this policeman stretched out a detaining hand, moistened his lips as though about to speak, and then thought better of it.

A moment later a short, fat man walked up to the policeman and whispered something in his ear. "I tell you it is," he whispered fiercely. "I know it is."

But Hector saw nothing of this. He pursued his way oblivious to everything about him; and it was not until after he had reached the Arlington house, mounted the stoop, and rung the bell that he even glanced back.

In the distance, a block away, he noticed two figures approaching, a short, stout one; the other, tall and in blue.

The door was opened by none other than Dorothy. She stood framed in the shadow of the hallway, a white statue of a woman, with dark, troubled eyes fixed on his face.

"I saw you coming, so I answered the door myself," she said in a hoarse, unnatural voice. "Something told me that you were coming. Follow me into the library. There's nobody there."

As she spoke, she held the door open till the young man entered; and then closing it behind him with a quick, nervous motion of her fingers, she slipped the bolt in place. McDonald following her, felt the cobwebs again gathering in his brain.

His nerves commenced to jangle all out of tune. What had happened to the world? he wondered wearily. Everything seemed unnatural today. Even Dorothy had changed.

Why was her face as white as chalk? Why did she look at him so? Surely there was terror and repulsion in her eyes.

And why was her voice so strange and low, as though she were afraid of waking somebody who slept? Had everybody gone mad, or was he mad?

Perhaps he was only sick. Yet why had she bolted the door? He had seen her do it with his own eyes; and it was never bolted till night.

Puzzled, and conscious of a growing fanciful fear, McDonald found himself in the library. The room was in semidarkness, but the windows were brightened up, as though the city were on fire. Far away, over the ragged rooftops, the sky

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was a fading crimson set with inky clouds that looked like black islands floating on a bloody sea.

The girl's head and shoulders were outlined against it for a moment, and then—like the curtain at the theater—the shade descended, shutting out the scene. Now the room was bathed in brightness. She had touched the electric button on the wall.

McDonald looked at Dorothy intently. At first he had thought that perhaps the fading daylight was responsible for her pallor; but now he saw that her face was even whiter in this bright light. About the eyes were dark circles which accentuated the ghastly hue of her cheeks.

The young man took a hasty step toward her. "Dorothy," he cried, "are you sick? What has happened to you?" He tried to take her hand.

But, as he stepped forward, she shrank back against the wall, yet her voice was perfectly calm. "Don't touch me," she cried, "don't touch me! There's blood on your hand!"

Involuntarily McDonald looked at his outstretched hand, and then into the girl's troubled eyes. "There's nothing there," he said dully. "What's the matter, Dorothy?"

"What's the matter?" she repeated. "How can you ask me that? You remember what you told me months ago? I thought you were joking then. What a fool I was! But how dare you come here? Aren't you afraid of anything in the world? Last night you were a murderer, and today you come to me. But I'm not afraid of you! I should open the window and cry for help. I should not shield you. Did you think of that? Then why do you come to me?"

THE young man put both his hands to his head to steady himself. The room seemed to be revolving slowly. "I don't understand," he muttered. "You see, I'm not very well today, Dorothy."

"You don't understand?" said the girl. "Surely there's nothing so difficult to understand in what I say. I repeat, why should you come to me? Because you confided in me that time, did you think I took you literally? When you said that you must become a murderer to be famous, did you think that I believed you would become a murderer?

"When you spoke of strangling little Tommy and knocking your uncle's brains out, did you imagine that I thought you would actually do these things? You may be mad, but you cannot be as mad as that.

"Why, even when I found Tommy dead, strangled by that strap, I didn't think for an instant that you had done it. It was too horrible to believe!

"But now, when your uncle lies murdered in his house, when the whole world knows that it was your hand that struck him down, I can no longer blind myself to the truth."

"What?" cried Hector in astonishment. "Is Uncle Tobias dead?"

"You should know that," said Dorothy coldly. "You murdered him last night."

For a moment the clouds of bewilderment in McDonald's brain parted, and a glimmer of light sifted through. He caught at the garment of flying truth with a trembling hand. "So they think that I murdered Uncle Tobias?" he said. "Do you think so, too, Dorothy?"

And then, for the first time, the girl's voice trembled. She looked into his eyes with astonishment, and, seeing truth mirrored there, her own flashed with the light of hope.

"What else could I think of, Hector?" she asked. "If you hadn't told me what you did that day, I wouldn't have believed this for an instant—not even after what the paper says. But, you see, what you told me has come to pass."

"And what does the paper say?"

"Here it is," she answered. Walking over to the library table, she picked up an evening edition and handed it to the young man. In these few moments her face had changed entirely. It had been calm, but now it was alive with struggling emotion.

Hector McDonald took the paper and bent over it. There, staring him in the face, was his own picture—a picture that had been taken two years ago—and under it, in big, black print, was his full name. His eyes wandered to the top of the page, and he began reading the heading of the article aloud:

NEPHEW SUSPECTED IN GRAHAM MURDER

When Mr. Tobias Graham was found murdered in his library this morning, the police succeeded in obtaining several clues which cast grave suspicion on his nephew. They found the safe open, and—

But just at this moment there came a violent ringing on the doorbell, which made the young man look up with a start. Dorothy, trembling in every limb, tiptoed over to the window and, drawing the shade toward her, peered out.

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"Oh, Hector," she cried, turning toward him, "it's a policeman! What can I do? What shall I do?" and her face was the color of ashes.

He walked up to her and put his arm about her waist. "Don't worry, Dorothy," he said. "I tell you that it's all right. I can prove that I had nothing to do with this. I have witnesses to prove it. I want you to believe me; that's all."

"But what shall I do?" she cried, her strength quite gone. "What shall I do? They've come to get you."

"Let them take me, Dorothy. It won't be for long—just as long as I want, that's all. I have witnesses to prove that I was asleep when this murder was committed. Let them in, dear. Be brave, and let them in."

As Dorothy walked toward the door, McDonald stood waiting near the window.

There was something in the set of his shoulders, something in the way he held his head, that was like the young man of other, happier days. Never had he appeared more imposing than at that moment. It was as though a new man had been created. His cheeks were flushed; his eyes were shining. He seemed to be looking into the face of a glorious future.

"It's come at last," he muttered to himself. "It's come at last! And now I'll play my hunch for all it's worth!"

TWO weeks later McDonald sat alone in his cell, writing busily at a small, ink-stained table. His sojourn in the Tombs had changed his appearance for the better. He seemed to have thrived on prison fare. His hollow cheeks had filled out; the dark rings about his eyes had disappeared; and his entire person pulsed with new life.

Money had accomplished the miracle. Money—that Hector had always despised—waving her golden wand, cried out "Presto! Change!" and the impossible had become a reality. McDonald, in these two weeks, had grown to be a celebrity.

Yes, now they came for his stories; and it was "pay in advance" with Hector during those days. He told them, chuckling inwardly, that perhaps in a month or so he might go to the electric chair, and then what good could money do him? He must have it now or not at all.

And so they had paid, grudgingly, perhaps, but still they had paid him just the price he asked. His name was ringing through the world. Every newspaper had column articles about him. His picture was examined daily by millions of curious eyes.

It was even indicated that he was a mad young genius who murdered people so that he might describe more vividly the actual sensations in the brain of the murderer. Feature writers alluded to his strange silence when he had been examined—prophesying that he would confess everything at his trial.

He had many interviews with reporters—and at these times he dressed himself with the greatest care—interviews in which he was witty, philosophic.

He had pet phrases which he used, and enjoyed reading afterward—pet phrases such as, "Why should an uncle stand in the way of the world?" "True greatness is a violent sacrifice of others." "How many relatives would Napoleon have served up to the English guns, if by this means he could have been assured of victory at Waterloo?" "If one must live, is it not better to butcher an uncle for one's daily bread than to butcher literature?"

After an hour or so spent in this manner the reporters had invariably hurried back to their papers, resolved to make the most of the prisoner's frankness. Consequently, he had sold more and more stories—and his name had grown up like a

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giant, pale mushroom in a single night.

Lawyers had come to him, offering to handle his case, but he had turned them all away, saying, with an air of insufferable egotism, that he was quite competent to take care of himself.

That very morning his old friend, Jim Evans, had come and had been very angry with him.

"Do you realize, Hector," he had said, "that it's only three weeks now till your trial? Do you want to throw your life away without a fight? You may be guilty, as those fool interviews in the papers show, but let me see if I can't do something for you at any rate."

And then McDonald had told everything to his friend. He had nothing more to fear by unburdening his mind.

His stories had been accepted, and his name was famous. All that now lay before him was his final triumph at the trial; and Jim should share with him in this triumph.

"And so you see," he had concluded, "I have witnesses—two witnesses. Of course, Mrs. Blake is a trifle insane, but Cousin Harry is all right. He's stupid and sensible enough to make a good witness."

"And you've never said a word to any one about this, Hector?"

"Not a soul. Why, man, this thing has made me famous. I've sold a dozen stories in the last week."

"Have you seen your witnesses since you've been here?"

"No. Why should I? They live at the bird store. You can find them there at any time."

"And they haven't called on you or written you? They've given no interviews to the papers? They've kept entirely quiet?"

"Yes. That is peculiar, isn't it? You know I never thought of it before. You see, I've been so busy writing."

"Busy? Good Lord, man! Do you realize that your life is hanging by a thread? How could you be such a fool? I'd have been here two weeks ago if I hadn't thought you'd engaged some other lawyer. Now I'm off."

"Where to, Jim? To look for my witnesses?"

"Yes, to look for them," said the lawyer and added grimly, "You'd better pray, Hector. I advise you to."

"Nonsense! You'll find them at the bird store all right."

Then the thin, young lawyer, seizing his hat with a nervous hand, had vanished, leaving Hector to his thoughts.

FOR some time McDonald had pondered over what his friend had said.

Vague misgivings for the future had begun to creep into his mind. "It's no use worrying," he told himself finally. "He's bound to find them. But if the kind old lady weren't quite so mad, and Cousin Harry were a little brighter, it would suit me just as well."

And then, shaking his head as though to rid himself of an unpleasant thought, the young man had seated himself at his desk and started writing to Dorothy. She, at least, after that first moment, had not believed him guilty. She had not even asked for proofs.

Daily he had received a note from her, sometimes an anxious note, but he had always answered them so reassuringly, so gaily—telling her that he could open his prison door whenever he wished—that gradually she had grown to believe in his absolute safety.

At last Hector finished the letter, and signed his name. Rising to his feet, he stretched himself and yawned.

"It's time Jim was back," he muttered, "It couldn't have taken him all this time to go up and see them. I wonder if he's having them make affidavits. There's an energetic fellow for you!"

He crossed the room leisurely, and picked up an old copy of a New York paper—the one, in fact, that Dorothy had handed him two weeks before, which he had preserved ever since.

NEPHEW SUSPECTED IN GRAHAM MURDER

When Tobias Graham was found murdered in his library this morning, the police succeeded in obtaining several clues which cast suspicion upon the dead man's nephew.

They found the safe open, and the old man lying on the floor with his head in a pool of blood.

"The poor old chap," murmured Hector. "I wish I could feel more cut up about his death than I do."

The police may have found the weapon that crushed the murdered man's skull. At any rate, they discovered footprints in the garden, directly beneath the library window.

An active man might very well have climbed the wall circling the garden, crossed the yard on the cement path, and, standing beneath the casement just long enough to leave his footprints, have leaped up, seized the window-ledge, and pulled himself in.

What adds horror to the crime is the fact that Mr. Graham had adopted a little boy who,

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while this murder was being committed, was sleeping the sleep of childish innocence in this room.

"I wonder what became of the 'Silent One,'" muttered Hector again, glancing up from the paper. "I suppose Mrs. Blake had to take him back. Ah, this must be Jim at last."

Footsteps could be heard in the prison corridor. Soon afterward the heavy iron door swung open, and James Evans, with his enigmatic eyeglasses fixed on his bony nose, stepped in and confronted the young man.

"Well, did you find them, Jim?" cried Hector, his heart beginning to beat faster than was its wont. "I suppose you've got all their affidavits made out by this time?"

No answer from the tall figure by the door.

"Well, why don't you speak? To be quite candid, I was growing a trifle nervous myself. Are they outside, waiting to see me?"

There was another silence—an unendurable silence. McDonald felt a clammy sweat breaking out on his forehead. His knees began to tremble.

"For God's sake, Jim, speak!" he cried. "What are you trying to do? Frighten me to death?"

"Hector," said the lawyer in a calm voice, "in the first place I want to tell you that I think you are innocent, and that I'm going to fight right beside you in this. Now, you want to brace up, for here's the bad news—those witnesses have disappeared."

"What?" gasped Hector. "They're not in the bird store—neither the old lady nor Cousin Harry? Oh, they must be there! You've made a mistake, Jim."

"They haven't been there in two weeks," said Evans grimly. "I've seen the landlord. They cleared out, bag and baggage, leaving the parrots in payment for two months' rent.

"I guess they were two shady characters—your kind old lady and Cousin Harry. It's a wonder they didn't leave the child behind them, too, but they didn't.

"The old woman called at your uncle's house the very day after the murder, and asked for it. The butler recognized her and gave her the child without asking any questions. That seems to have been the last time she was seen in the city."

"But where could they have gone to?" cried McDonald despairingly. "Why should they go away like this?"

"Didn't want to step up to the witness stand, I imagine. Characters too shady, perhaps. Did they have anything against you?"

"No; Mrs. Blake and I were the best of friends."

"And Cousin Harry?"

"I only saw him occasionally. He didn't have anything against me, though."

"Well, Hector," said the lawyer, stepping forward and putting his hand on the young man's shoulder, "we've got to find those witnesses somehow. We'll need them at the trial.

"You've been ruining your case ever since you've been here by those fool interviews with reporters; and the prosecuting attorney will have something up his sleeve.

"They've got more than just your silence and that open safe to back up their case. We must be ready for anything. We may need that hunch of mine that's coming, after all."

DOROTHY ARLINGTON descended the staircase and entered the living room. Here she found a tall, thin young man awaiting her—a young man with a cadaverous face and hollows under his cheekbones—a young man with flashing eyeglasses firmly fixed on a long, bony nose.

"This is Mr. Evans, isn't it?" she asked, advancing toward him.

"Yes, Miss Arlington." He rose to his feet and took her proffered hand. "Hector asked me to call. He said that you were interested."

"Interested?" cried Dorothy with a catch in her voice. "I'm more than that."

"So I see. But I must hurry. My time is limited."

"Is there anything new?" she asked, sinking into a chair almost breathlessly.

"Perhaps you didn't hear of what happened in the court this morning?"

"No, I haven't."

"Well, I felt it coming for a long time. You see, I know quite a little about the prosecuting attorney. He's got a reputation for springing surprises. He likes to keep his cards hidden until the last moment and then throw them down and rake in the pot. Dramatic situations are his specialty."

"Yes?"

"So, knowing this about the man, I felt there must be something up his sleeve. This afternoon he brought it out. You remember that cane Hector had—the one his father left him?"

"A gold-headed cane? Yes, I remember."

"This morning the prosecuting attorney brought it out—or what was left of it, for

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it was broken in two pieces. He had several witnesses to swear to its identity, including Mr. Graham's butler, John.

"Well, to make a long story short, it was found the morning after the murder beside the dead man, and its golden head, dented and covered with dry blood, corresponded exactly with the wound at the back of the old man's scalp. Undoubtedly it was the weapon used."

"Yes?" said Dorothy, gripping the arm of her chair and turning deathly white.

"Yes," continued the lawyer bitterly, "and that isn't all. That was only exhibit Number one.

"Exhibit two was soon to follow. I had noticed a large wooden box beside this legal conjurer, but I couldn't imagine what it was for. I was soon to learn.

"After he had made his point with the cane, he opened this box and brought out of it a piece of sod that had been taken from Mr. Graham's garden—directly beneath the library window. Tiny blades of grass had just begun to grow on it, and the rain had made it so soft on the afternoon before the murder that it had taken the impression of a human foot as though it were heated wax.

"Evidently it had been removed the following morning and kept in cold storage till it was frozen into a permanent shape.

"Next the prosecuting attorney brought out one of Hector's old shoes, and it fitted the footprint exactly. Several nails had been driven into the sole in the shape of a cross, and you could see in the footprint the slight indentations their projecting heads made.

"You see, Miss Arlington, what kind of a man we are fighting—the kind of man who gives illustrated lectures to his jury."

"But you still think he's innocent, don't you, Mr. Evans?" and Dorothy looked at him almost beseechingly.

"Oh, yes, I think he's innocent; but that won't do him any good. We've got to make the jury think that he's innocent. All reason and common sense seem to be against him.

"If I didn't know Hector so well; if I didn't know that he was as incapable of committing a crime like this as some little child in a baby carriage, I wouldn't think that he is innocent either.

"I won't disguise anything from you, Miss Arlington; I tell you frankly that if something doesn't turn up he's got very little chance of being acquitted.

"We must look at it the way the world does. Here's a young man arrested for a crime. Does he deny his guilt? No. Does he assert his innocence? No. He simply says nothing when he is examined.

"Later he has interviews with reporters and encourages them to believe that he is really a murderer. His uncle is standing between him and a large fortune, and his uncle is murdered. Hector's cane is found beside the body.

"The safe is open, and his uncle's rubies are gone. He is the only one who knows the combination of the safe. Lastly, Hector's footprints are found in the garden directly beneath the open window. Very strong circumstantial evidence, I should say.

"And now what has he to offer on his side? After waiting two weeks, he tries to prove an alibi. He says that he was at a certain bird store in the city on that night. He names witnesses who he says can prove it.

"But where are they? They have disappeared; and there is no one to prove anything for him."

"But isn't it possible to find these witnesses?" cried Dorothy.

"I have tried, and I can say that it doesn't seem possible. Why, they've had almost a month's start. Very likely they're in China by now. A tall man, an old woman, and a baby—it's like looking for three needles in a hundred haystacks. And yet I've got a hunch that if we could find them, it would clear up this whole case. I believe they know more about it than anyone else.

"But I must hurry off, Miss Arlington. Hector told me to give you his love. He's bearing up wonderfully."

"And don't you think there's any hope?" asked Dorothy. "You know, Mr. Evans, that I thought him guilty myself until after I had seen and talked with him. But how could anybody look into his eyes and think so?"

"Juries are not generally composed of physiognomists," said the young lawyer grimly. "Facts are what they want. But there must be hope, even if it's only a hunch. I still believe in God, Miss Arlington."

For some time after Evans had taken his departure Dorothy sat bolt upright in her chair, staring at the rain that splashed against the window. She could see a mist descending that, like a shroud, seemed enveloping the city.

It was as though the gray storm clouds were sailing so close to the earth that their wet, weary wings brushed against it in

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passing. Far away, over the roof tops, was a shadowy church spire that, like a finger, seemed trying to point out God.

But why was He so far away—so swallowed up in the gloomy caverns of space? Surely, here was work for Him to do—a miracle to be accomplished. Now was the time to open the prison gates; now was the time to save the innocent and punish the guilty.

But perhaps He was taking a holiday up there. Perhaps He was unwilling to come out into the wet. After all, what difference did it make to Him if some of His dolls lost their paint—if some of their bright coloring was washed away by tears.

"I must be brave," said Dorothy; but, as she said it, her eyes began to fill. And then quite suddenly her overstrained nerves gave way and she burst out into unrestrained weeping. And she was still crying when Arlington found her; she was still crying when he took her into his powerful arms and whispered to her as though she were a little child.

"I must go to the trial tomorrow, father," she said at last. "Hector needs me. You'll let me go, won't you?"

And then this strange, transformed man hesitated for a moment. When he answered, his voice was trembling.

"Yes, Dorothy, you may go," he said. "You may go, and I'll go with you, dear."

For several moments there was silence in the room. The mist seemed to grow thicker till it enveloped the city like a gray blanket of shadow. At times the distant church spire seemed lost in it for an instant, only to appear again with startling distinctness.

At other times its heavy extremity alone disappeared and reappeared, as though the finger were beckoning to God. Perhaps He saw it. Who can tell?

HECTOR McDONALD sat alone in his cell, staring blankly at the wall. He still wore his recently purchased finery; but, alas, everything about him suggested the gorgeous peacock that has just been caught out in a thunderstorm.

His feathers were of the finest, but unfortunately they were drooping. And it is no wonder that this tie was carelessly tied, that these trousers needed pressing, that this coat was badly wrinkled; for McDonald, during these last few days, had gone through a legal mill which grinds very small indeed.

It was six o'clock, morning, and all night long the young man had been walking about his cell like some kind of imprisoned animal. At one moment he had been cold and shivering; at the next bathed in perspiration.

In the long, dark hours he had longed for the coming of the day, and now that the gray light was sifting in through the barred windows, he felt that another enemy was here.

For the last few nights sleep had deserted him. It seemed as though, now that his body was imprisoned in a state of inactivity, his mind had become doubly active.

It refused to be bound by the shackles of sleep, and, when it was taken off guard for a moment, it lived on in the form of horrible dreams. And finally, when he was alone in his cell, his mind seemed to leave his body altogether and, opening the prison door, fly out into the world.

It was at the Arlington house with Dorothy, weeping with her as it saw the loneliness of advancing years; it was with the jury, arguing with them, pleading with them, persuading them that he had told the truth; it was pursuing, now by land and now by sea, three flying forms that never turned their faces when he called, that never answered his agonized appeal.

It leaped backward and forward over the rope of time. Now it was a child beside its mother's knees; now it was a grown man with a familiar face, walking toward a strange and terrific chair.

Sometimes, from the outer world, it peered through the prison bars and pitied what it saw within. This healthy young body that was made for the sunshine, these muscles, the wonderful mechanism of the human machine—all to be sacrificed; to be led like a sheep by the butcher and then sacrificed. Oh, the pity of it! The pity of it!

Sometimes it was in the courtroom, listening to the testimony with straining ears. How distinctly it saw every face in this jury! There was the prosecuting attorney—a dark, little man of finicky habits, who dusted his papers now and then with a monogrammed handkerchief. How it was fascinated by his every word!

It had learned to call him "The Man of Many Miracles," for it had seen him prove that poor Hector McDonald's shoe fitted a murderer's footprint, and that poor Hector McDonald's cane had struck an old man down.

After this it watched the dark, little man with the feeling of watching something supernaturally evil.

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But McDonald's body for days had seemed dead. When he ate, it was mechanically; when he walked about his cell he felt nothing under his feet—just as if he were walking on air.

Nothing that he did seemed in any way premeditated. Occasionally he would find a pencil in his hand and, without the slightest idea as to where it had come from, his fingers would open and it would fall to the floor. At other times, passing the looking-glass on the wall, he would see a vaguely familiar face with a gaping, stupid mouth and round, astonished eyes.

Now, on the morning of the last day, the deciding day of the trial, he sat, as unnaturally as a clothes dummy, staring moodily before him. His imagination had leaped forward through the weary hours and was in the prisoner's dock, waiting for the jury.

There was the prosecuting attorney, rubbing his hands together in a pleased way and whispering from time to time to a stenographer; there was the judge, who would soon be pronouncing sentence—a large-featured old man with tight, compressed lips; and lastly, there was Dorothy's face, standing out from the multitude of others, as though it were painted in fire.

But at this moment the cell door opened, and Hector McDonald's mind came back to the body with a jerk. "Who can it be?" he muttered. "It's too early for Jim. He won't get here till night."

In this the young man was mistaken.

It proved to be his legal adviser, and, at the first glance, Hector realized that something had changed the lawyer's expression since he had seen him last. Those shoulders, which had been drooping, had straightened overnight; those thin lips, that had been sagging at the corners, now were drawn into two straight crimson lines of determination; those eyeglasses, that had been dull and misty, were flashing with rejuvenated zeal.

"What's happened, Jim?" cried Hector with a glimmer of hope in his voice. "You haven't found the witnesses?"

"No, it isn't that, Hector."

"Well, what is it, then?"

"Well, it may be something, or it may be nothing. And yet do you remember my telling you about that hunch that was coming into my life some day?"

"Yes."

"Well, I think it's come. I can feel that this is the psychological moment."

"For heaven's sake, speak out! What is it?"

"It may have been written by some fanatic; I can't possibly see what can come out of it, and yet I've got a feeling that something will."

"Now look here, Jim," cried McDonald, drops of perspiration standing on his forehead, "I've stood just about as much of this suspense as I'm going to. Tell me everything, and be quick about it."

"Well, Hector," said the young lawyer, approaching his client and handing him a slip of paper, "I got this letter in my mail this morning. You read it."

McDonald held the piece of paper before his face with a hand that trembled. Let us read it with him.

Mr. Hector McDonald's Lawyer

Dear Sir:

That young man is innocent, and you can prove it in court tomorrow if you will follow these directions. You must believe in God, in the first place and in me in the second place. Now, this is what you must do. When you get up to plead for his life, don't say a single word aloud; just whisper the Lord's Prayer to yourself, so that your lips move. Do this, and God's voice shall be given to you. And when the voice comes, do not stop praying for an instant. If you do, the voice shall be taken away from you. I would say more, but I am afraid of Tweedledee. He suspects me since I found my brain. If he knew what I was doing, he would have Hercules strangle me. What can the voice accomplish without the body and the brain? But I can't let Mr. McDonald be shut in, away from the wind and the sunshine. He loves them so.

Respectfully,
THE ECHO.

"Somebody quite insane must have written this," said Hector, finally. "The last of it sounds like my old friend, Mrs. Blake."

"So I thought," said Evans. "And what do you think I did? Before I came here, I consulted with a handwriting expert that I know. Routed him out of bed and made him give his opinion of it. He prides himself on being able to tell the difference between a man's and a woman's writing at a glance. Well, he knocked my theory on the head. He said that undoubtedly a man had written this. Of course he may be wrong."

"But what are you going to do? You're not going to follow this absurd advice and mutter the Lord's Prayer, are you?"

"That's exactly what I am going to do," said Evans solemnly. "It's a hunch, and I'm going to act on it. We can't lose anything. We've got no case as it stands."

"But what could possibly come out of it?"

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"How could I know? I'm going to do it just the same. Perhaps my handwriting expert was all wrong and Mrs. Blake did actually write this letter. If she did, she might show up in court to hear me say the Lord's Prayer. You can be on the watch for her. She'd be able to help our case. I know. Why, honestly, Hector, if I had a hunch to stand on my head during that trial, I'd do it. This is no case for common sense—this case of yours—it calls for a miracle, or nothing."

"Miracles don't happen these days," said McDonald, with a sad smile.

THE sun shown brightly through the window in the two steady streams of light. It touched the white hair of the judge; it illumined the dark figure of the prosecuting attorney; it fell on Evans' face, reflecting a little patch of brightness on either cheek, and, last of all, it rested in a yellow pool at the prisoner's feet.

Farther back in the courtroom the people sat in shadow.

But there was something in a girl's white face; something in that old man's wondering eyes, that manifested a different feeling—one of the tragedies of life.

In the very rear of the room, where his face was lost in shadow, sat another figure that deserves a passing glance—a nervous figure with large, luminous eyes. From time to time this man moistened his lips and, glancing about him on all sides like some hunted animal, looked down from time to time at the little notebook that lay open on his knee.

Now the prosecuting attorney arose.

"Gentlemen of the Jury: I am now going to sum up the evidence for the State; I am going to close up every loophole that might offer an escape from justice; I am going to refresh your memory on what I have already proved to you.

"The accused, Mr. Hector McDonald, is the only relative of the deceased Mr. Graham. He had lived with his uncle since he was six years old, and only left him last fall. He was naturally familiar with the house; and the butler, John McCawley, has testified that he knew the combination of the safe and has opened it for his uncle in McCawley's presence. Besides uncle and nephew, no one has been found who knew this combination. As you know, the door of that safe was open on the morning after the murder, and the rubies gone.

"Gentlemen of the Jury: The accused, being Mr. Graham's only relative, was, therefore, his natural heir. A year previous to the crime he had an altercation with his uncle, after which he was ordered out of the house. Since then he has led a life of poverty.

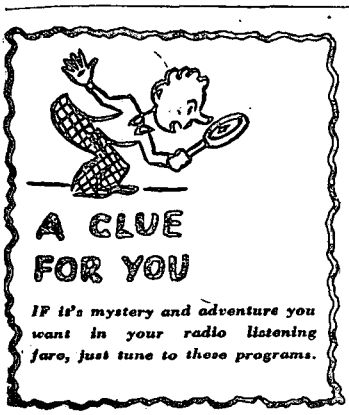
"Now, on the very afternoon before the murder, Mr. Graham had adopted a child and had had that child brought into his house. It is believed that Mr. Graham intended making his will—a will perhaps in favor of this child.

"What effect might this have on the accused? That is point number two.

"Gentlemen of the jury: On the morning after the murder the prisoner's cane was found beside Mr. Graham's body. You have all seen that cane. It has been identified as belonging to the accused and has been proved by experts to have been the weapon used in committing the crime. That is point number three.

"Gentlemen of the Jury: Footprints were found in Mr. Graham's garden, directly beneath the library window. These footprints were made on the night of the murder. Upon examination the prisoner's shoes were found to correspond exactly with these footprints—even down to the smallest detail. That is point number four.

"Gentlemen of the Jury: When the ac-



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cused was arrested and examined, he remained silent. He did not deny his guilt. On the contrary, when interviewed by reporters he was heard to let fall such incriminating phrases as these: 'Why should an uncle stand in the way of the world?' 'How many uncles would Napoleon have served up to the English guns if by this means he could have been assured the victory of Waterloo?' Would an innocent man have made such remarks as these? That is point number five.

"Gentlemen of the Jury: Since the accused has secured the services of a legal adviser, he has been attempting to clear himself of this charge. But what kind of a defense does the accused put up? He tells us that on the night of May 15, the date of the murder, he was at a certain bird store in the city; that he was sleeping there while the crime was being committed. We ask for proof and he tells us that there are two witnesses who can swear to this statement, but that unfortunately they have disappeared. That is point number six.

"Gentlemen of the Jury: This case rests in your hands. The accused, in my opinion, is proved guilty of murder in the first degree; and it only remains for you to see that justice is meted out." The prosecuting attorney, bowing slightly, sat down.

There was a rustling noise in the courtroom as all eyes were turned to the attorney for the defense. It was noticed that he was very pale, almost as pale as the prisoner himself; and that the hand he raised to protect his eyes from the sunlight trembled.

Suddenly Evans leaned toward the prisoner. "Hector," he whispered, "is Mrs. Blake out there in the courtroom? For God's sake tell me if she is!"

"No," answered McDonald in a dull voice, "she isn't there. There's no old woman out there—not one."

The attorney for the defense removed his eyeglasses, polished them absently with his handkerchief, looked about him on all sides hastily and then rose slowly to his feet. What was going on within him at that moment? He seemed calm enough, and yet behind those enigmatic glasses his eyes were flashing strangely; beneath that unruffled waistcoat his heart was beating great waves of blood up into his head.

He was torn between the two wild horses —Hope and Despair. His mind was a desolate land of Despondency, but somewhere in his soul a spark of Optimism was smouldering. The feet of Fact failed to support him, but he felt vaguely that the psychological moment was at hand. Far back in the courtroom, a man with a beautiful, girlish face and large luminous eyes placed two fingers to his lips.

"'Our Father Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name,'" murmured the lawyer, "'Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.'"

And then, at that very instant, a voice rang through the courtroom; a voice that sounded strangely like his own and yet was somehow different. He looked about him wildly to see who had spoken—to see who it was that had just addressed the jury.

All faces were turned his way; all eyes were fixed upon him. This must be the voice of God!

"'Our Father, Who art in Heaven,'" he murmured through trembling lips.

And the voice reiterated: "Gentlemen of the jury."

"'Hallowed be Thy name,'" muttered Evans.

"Hector McDonald is innocent!" said the voice. And then as the pale lips of the lawyer continued to form the words of the Lord's Prayer, the voice, keeping pace with them, grew clearer, louder. And the faces of the people were turned his way; a multitude of eyes were fixed upon him; it seemed as though this were not God's voice, but were really all his own.

And everything that followed was like a dream. The courtroom appeared to be floating in mist; the spectators were as shadows; all things became vague, unreal, except this wandering voice—this voice of God that gave him strength.

"GENTLEMEN of the jury," said the voice: "The prisoner is innocent. I can prove that he is innocent, but first I must tell you the story of how all this came to pass.

"Five years ago, in the town of Milledge, a circus had stopped for a few days. In the side show of this circus were three men. One was a dwarf called Tweedledee, another was a giant who went by the name of Hercules, while the third was a poor, unhappy fellow named Echo.

"Echo was a ventriloquist who wished to give up his calling and go out into the world. Tweedledee knew this, as he knew everything, and told Echo to come with him, saying that they would go out into the world as to a dance—that Adventure would take them by the hand and lead them. Also he persuaded Hercules to go.

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He is evil, but he has a brain—has Tweedledee!

"Then all three went out into the world together. Tweedledee called himself the brain; Echo, the voice, and Hercules, the body. Where else in the world could you find such a Brain, such a Voice, and such a Body? That's what Tweedledee said.

"These three started out on a career of crime, because the mind was evil. Echo would have turned back, but he had to obey the Brain and Body. What can the Voice do without the Brain and Body? Ah, I'm finding that out!

"They murdered the Human Skeleton the very first night; they murdered him and hung him up in a pawn shop—like a clothes dummy they hung him up—and Tweedledee made up a joke, and pinned it on his breast. It was humorous, yet horrible—that joke. It was humorous and horrible, and all three laughed—but Echo shuddered as he laughed.

"They had to leave the country after this. It was too dangerous to remain. One year they spent in Paris, three others in London; and the wickedness they did would make your blood run cold.

"You see, gentlemen of the jury, Tweedledee dressed himself up like a baby. He was only two feet high. He would pass for one till you looked deep into his eyes. But Echo, who had always longed for freedom, was farther away from it now than ever. The Mind said, 'Do this, do that,' and the poor Voice had to obey.

"Finally they came to New York, gentlemen of the jury, and all this time Echo had not had a single hour of freedom.

"And now he must work again. He must run a parrot shop, because he could make all the parrots talk. That's what Tweedledee ordered, and so he must obey. But worse than that, Echo had to dress himself up like an old lady and learn by heart a thousand different things. Never once could he go out in the sunshine where the shadows dance along before the breeze.

"And this parrot shop became the center of crime. First, Mr. Glover came and bought a bird; he was murdered in less than a week. Then there was the Arlington boy. McDonald bought him a parrot. How Tweedledee hated McDonald because he used to rumple his hair and blow cigarette smoke in his eyes; But he waited patiently. Ah! how he could wait, could Tweedledee.

"One rainy night Hercules left Tweedledee on the Arlingtons' stoop. Miss Arlington had him carried up to the nursery where the poor boy slept. You can imagine what happened then. It was horrible! horrible! That evening Hercules brought Tweedledee back. Under his nightgown he had a diamond necklace and several other things.

"You would think, gentlemen of the jury, that Tweedledee would have left the city after that. But you don't know Tweedledee. He was never satisfied—never. Besides, he said that he had a long score to settle.

"One day, when he was out in his baby carriage, Mr. Graham saw him and took a fancy to him. Several weeks later the old man adopted Tweedledee. That was what he had been waiting for. He knew that Mr. Graham was very wealthy and that he was McDonald's uncle—and so he laid his plans.

"At that time, McDonald came daily to the parrot shop. Echo wanted to warn him, but he was afraid of Tweedledee. What did the evil Brain do then?

"He found out what size shoes the prisoner wore, and had Hercules construct peculiar stilts with little wooden feet to fit these shoes. The very morning that he left for Mr. Graham's, Tweedledee gave his final instructions to Hercules and Echo. Later, when he had gone, McDonald came to the shop, and they acted upon these instructions. As luck would have it, the young man had his cane with him—something that Tweedledee had not foreseen.

"The rest, gentlemen of the jury, you can imagine. A drop or two of sleeping potion in his tea; his cane and shoes taken while he sleeps; Hercules walking on stilts in the garden—stilts pushed into McDonald's shoes—Tweedledee giving the signal; the giant climbing through the open window and striking the old man down with the prisoner's cane—all quite simple, gentlemen of the jury, quite simple."

The voice died away and the lips of the lawyer ceased to move. For a moment there was dead silence in the courtroom, and then, like the wind howling through a wilderness, a great shout of laughter rang out. Now the prosecuting attorney was on his feet, his face working convulsively.

"Your honor! Gentlemen of the jury!" he cried. "This is too much! The imagination of my legal adversary should be appreciated, but unfortunately, this is a courtroom and not a literary circle.

"Dwarfs disguised as babies, giants walking on stilts, and ventriloquists selling parrots are all very well in fiction, I

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suppose, but here we want facts. May I ask Mr. Evans what proof he has to back up this truly remarkable story? Can he produce the dwarf dressed as a baby; the ventriloquist selling parrots; the giant walking on stilts? Where are his witnesses?"

There was another shout of laughter, followed by silence. Evans felt that a hundred pair of eyes were fixed upon him. Bending his head slightly, he murmured devoutly for the fifteenth time, "'Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name.'"

Scarcely had his lips begun to move when the voice spoke again.

"Yes," it said wearily, "I know where Tweedledee is, and where Hercules is, but Echo has gone away with the wind: the Voice has left them forever!

"There's a room on the second floor of the boarding-house at 78 Brooke Street. Go there and you will find them.

"Also, if you need more evidence, lift up the loose board—the second from the door—and under it you will find Mr. Graham's stolen rubies, Mr. Glover's jewelry, and the diamond necklace that came from the Arlington house. That should be evidence enough to show that I don't lie."

Again the voice died away, but this time no laughter followed in its wake. The tall young lawyer for the defense raised his head and, beneath his flashing eyeglasses, two red spots glowed brightly, one in either cheek.

"Yes, your honor," he cried in a voice trembling with excitement—a voice that even the amazed spectators realized had changed. "Yes, your honor, I can prove what I say. The real murderers are waiting for you at 78 Brooke Street. I move that this case be adjourned."

CHAPTER VI

WHILE THE DEMON NODDED

THE same sunlight that streamed through the courtroom windows on the last day of McDonald's trial also sifted through the broken shutters of a dilapidated house on Brooke Street. Like its inmates, this dwelling place seemed to sleep during the day with lowered eyelids, and to awaken at nightfall to its habitual career of crime.

A house, like a human brain, often gives an outward expression of what goes on within; and the expression of this house, even on a beautiful June day, was sinister and lowering. It seemed daring the passer-by to break its drunken slumber.

Up three flights of creaking stairs, at the end of a dusty hall, was a door that sadly needed varnish—a door with a china knob which bore the finger marks of many a grimy fist. If this uninviting exterior did not warn off the visitor, in a moment more he would find himself in a poorly ventilated little room—a little room that looked out into the street through a single dirty windowpane.

On this afternoon the sun forced its way through the broken shutters and fell upon the faded carpet in quivering, uneven bars of light. It illumined the tiny feet of a little figure sitting in a toy chair near the window—a little figure dressed in a child's bathrobe and slippers—a little figure busily engaged in writing in a large blank-book which it held on its knees.

Farther back in the room, in the shadow, was a large double bed; beside it stood a wicker baby carriage. Sprawled out on the mattress—like some kind of recumbent statue—was the body of a huge man. His head nearly touched the wall on one side; his feet threatened the perambulator on the other. This prostrate giant stared solemnly at the ceiling through white clouds of tobacco smoke that rose steadily from a large, black cigar which he held between his teeth. He appeared to be musing over some puzzling problem, so steadfast was his gaze, so deep were the furrows between his eyes. In reality, he was in the mental stupor of a gorged snake sleeping in the sunshine.

At last the little figure by the window sighed heavily, placed his pencil on the arm of his chair, and looked up. "Well, I've finished at last, Hercules," he said in a childish treble.

For a moment there was silence. It was as though the giant had lost his voice somewhere in that huge body of his and were groping for it.

"Finished what, Tweedledee?" he growled at last.

"Why, our last case, Hercules!" cried the dwarf irritably. "You've slept so much lately that you're only half alive— Our last case—the Graham murder."

"Ah, yes, Tweedledee."

"I'm only waiting now till McDonald is convicted. That will add the finishing touch to it. A great case that! I've never had one that pleased me more." And Tweedledee rubbed his tiny hands together while a strange smile lighted up his chubby face.

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"You never liked McDonald, did you, Tweedledee?"

"Like him? Like him? I hated him from the first. You've no idea how I hated him! Why, the liberties he took with me—no one has taken for years. Sometimes I had all I could do to stand them; all I could do not to order you to tear him limb from limb. Sometimes it seemed as though I could not wait until the end.

"You remember the Human Skeleton, Hercules? Well, even he never dared to do the things this fool did. Why, he used to pull my hair, and blow cigarette smoke in my face! Think of that—in the face of Tweedledee! Perhaps I wouldn't have tried to kill the Arlington baby if it hadn't been for him. I knew he would feel it!"

"Well," said Hercules, "you have him now, Tweedledee."

"Yes, I have him now," cried the dwarf. "But it was hard to wait, Hercules. I nearly had to wring his neck a score of times. That day when he said that a monkey might have robbed Glover's body of the jewels for instance. Yes, I was on the point of it then, but I said to myself, 'No, I'll wait.' Killing the body alone is all very well when you're merely irritated, but when you hate with all your soul—why, then it's a different matter, Hercules.

"You must kill everything then. What your enemy holds dearest must also die. If I killed him by your hands, his reputation for good would remain alive. His body only would die; and his friends and his fiancée would respect and cherish his memory: but, on the other hand, when I make the law his executioner, when I brand him as a murderer—why, that's quite different, Hercules. Do you see?"

"Well—partly—partly," said the giant slowly, staring solemnly at the ceiling through a twisting ring of smoke. "Yet you're proud of your criminal record, Tweedledee. You've often told me that you write up every case so carefully because some day you want the whole world to know what you have done."

"Ah," cried the dwarf, "it's so difficult to make you understand anything! You have no ambition but to kill, and then to sleep all day like some animal. Real ambition is dead in you. The body can never understand the mind, for it wishes for nothing beyond the grave. The mind would live always if it could. Death is a horrible phantom that overshadows it.

"Sometimes the mind seizes religion as a weapon to use against this phantom; sometimes it seeks to create for itself a prolonged mental life in music, in art, in literature—in crime.

"That is what I am doing. I want to be taken seriously by the world some day—after I've gone out of the world. I want to leave something behind me that will live. Sometimes it is only by murder that we can perpetuate life. I am writing the story of my existence in blood, so that many generations will tremble at it."

"But all the newspapers have big stories about McDonald," said the giant in a sleepy voice. "It seems to me that you've made him famous, Tweedledee."

"Famous? Just for a moment, that's all. A mushroom that springs up in a single night, and that dies in a single day. But lasting fame? Nonsense! He apparently commits a crime in a blundering fashion, with no more artistic feeling than a butcher killing a steer. On the very next day he is arrested, and two months later goes to the electric chair. A fine career in crime to give lasting fame! No, to be remembered, one must create something new—something quite out of the ordinary—something such as I have done. Here in this book are twelve murders described by the murderer—each one a masterpiece. And the writing of them is good, too, very good. To express, one must know and feel! I have known all this, and I have felt all this."

"And still, Tweedledee," said the giant "Why is it that you insist upon destroying all evidence and yet keep that book about you? Suppose it were found?"

"No fear of that. Who looks in a baby carriage for evidence? Why, it's safer there than those rubies under the board. Never fear, Hercules, I want to live a long time yet, so that I can write a great many more stories before I go. By writing them I gain immortality of the brain. But there are other things that we have to fear, Hercules—other things."

"What things, master?"

TWEEDLEDEE put his hands over his face and was silent for a moment. When he lowered them again his whole expression had changed. There had been a certain dreamy light in his eyes; but now it was gone—they were cold and glittering. He bent toward Hercules, and his face was alive with some great emotion.

"It's Echo," he whispered. "I can't hold him much longer. He's slipping away from me fast. I can feel it every time he speaks. The other day I found him talking to that little wooden image he used to have. He

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still thinks it has his brain. He's afraid of me, and that's all I can hold him with—just fear. He's growing discontented; I can see it in his eyes."

"But Echo wouldn't dare—" cried the giant.

"No, he wouldn't. He's afraid of me; and yet we have to trust him too much. He liked McDonald. I could see that he did. And then, again, Hercules, it's always the voice that betrays the body and the brain.

"That's been ringing in my head constantly these last few days—it is the voice that betrays the body and the brain. Of course, we had to trust him in this. We had to wait until they convicted McDonald before we got away. The law requires a victim, and then it is satisfied.

"I wanted news badly; and Echo was the only one of us who was safe on the streets. And yet I'm afraid of him—I'm afraid of my own voice."

"Tell me," said the giant very slowly, and as he spoke his great red fingers opened and shut, "tell me, Tweedledee, couldn't we go through life without a voice? Perhaps before we reach Paris we could lose the voice."

"So I was thinking. It's safer without a voice. But, s-s-h! I hear him in the hallway now. He's come back to tell us about the trial. We won't let him out of our sight again, Hercules, remember that."

A light tap sounded on the door. "Come in, Echo, come in," cried Tweedledee.

There was an instant of hesitation, and then the door swung slowly open. But there was no Echo waiting on the threshold—no Echo with trembling lips and luminous eyes—no Echo of the wandering voice. No, it was quite a different sight the dwarf now saw—a sight that seemed to turn him to stone on the instant—a sight that for once quite paralyzed the brain.

Five large policemen blocked the passageway, and five pairs of steadfast eyes were fixed on Tweedledee.

For a moment the silence was unbroken, and then there came a muffled roar from the bed. A huge body leaped through the air and landed on its stockinged feet in the middle of the room.

And, as happened in the sideshow, Hercules became terrible. Foam gathered about his lips; the veins on his forehead became fat, twisting worms; he lifted two tremendous fists above his head.

He stood there for an instant, bending at the waist, about to hurl himself forward, when five hands were extended toward him, five steady hands holding revolvers in their palms.

"That's the man," said an authoritative voice from the hall. "Arrest him, and the little one, too."

"Drop those hands and bring your wrists together," commanded one of the policemen, stepping forward. "Come on now, be quick about it." He put the barrel of his gun against the giant's chest.

For a moment it seemed that Hercules, in spite of the odds against him, in spite of the five menacing revolvers, still intended to fight his way out of the room. Perhaps if Tweedledee had not seized him by the coat sleeve it would have been too late. The brain came out of its trance of terror in time to save the body.

"It's all right, Hercules," he whispered shrilly. "Do as they tell you; put your wrists together."

The giant still hesitated, and then, with a deep sigh, lowered his two enormous hands. There came a sharp snap, and the hairy wrists were circled by steel bands. Now a policeman held him by either arm. Tweedledee, his face ghastly white, his eyes shining like two red-hot coals, was in the grasp of a third policeman, who looked down upon his tiny captive with a broad smile.

By this time the man who had spoken authoritatively in the hallway—a man who had stationed himself behind the others—entered the room. He was tall, wore eyeglasses, and had a crimson spot on either cheek. He looked at Hercules—that gigantic figure, standing with drooping head and dull eyes; he looked at Tweedledee, so tiny in the child's bathrobe, with white, upturned face and parted lips; and as he turned to the door again, his glasses seemed trying to reflect the triumph in his heart.

"Come here, Tom," said he to one of the men. "See if that second board isn't loose."

Soon a policeman was on his knees. Another moment and he had pried up the board, and, putting his hand cautiously in the black aperture, pulled out of it two small boxes and a chamois bag.

The tall, thin young man turned toward Tweedledee. His face at that instant appeared to the dwarf like a skull wearing eyeglasses.

"Well, I guess this settles your case," said he.

The little face looked up into his; his glittering eyes were covered by a veil of long, black lashes, and then the dwarf's

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shrill, penetrating voice echoed through the room.

"Did Hector McDonald turn State's evidence?" he cried.

"What!" said Evans; and for the second time that day he felt the solid earth giving way beneath his feet.

"Did he turn State's evidence?" continued Tweedledee, giving the young lawyer a bitter, sidelong look. "He was the one who put us up to this. We were to get the rubies—he was to get the old man's fortune."

What made the lawyer's eyes leave Tweedledee's; what made him turn to the copybook lying on the arm of the toy chair; what made him step forward and pick it up? We do not know. Perhaps it was the last touch of the psychological moment—the moment when he could not lose.

And then Tweedledee for the first time lost control of himself. As he saw the lawyer pick up the book, as he saw him start to open it, he wrenched himself out of the grasp of the smiling policeman and ran forward.

"Give it to me!" he screamed, dancing up and down before Evans like a puppet on wires. "It's mine—so give it to me!"

And the young lawyer's cheeks again turned crimson. Holding the book just above Tweedledee's twitching fingers, he shook his head slowly and solemnly.

"No, no, my little friend," said he. "We'll need this, I imagine, before we're through with you."

A PRISON and an insane asylum are the two institutions of man that are capable of throwing a shadow over the handiwork of God. No matter how brightly the sun may shine, no matter how gaily the river winds along, no matter how sweet is the breath from the meadow, the passer-by still experiences an unhealthy feeling of mingled pity and repulsion—an urgent desire to hurry on his way.

In every prison, just as in every man, there are chambers more terrible than others—chambers given over to death.

In man, these chambers are sometimes filled with tender thoughts, new-born sorrows, dawning ambitious, or worn-out lust. In prison, these chambers are filled with condemned murderers, old and feeble; young, and pulsing with life; repentant and fearful, or bitter and resigned.

Tweedledee sat all alone in one of these cells, staring intently at the barred windows. He was waiting for the morning as for his only friend—and yet it took so long, so very long to come. He felt like a spider watching a huge heel descending upon him slowly—a wounded spider that could only lie here and quiver slightly. He had been watching this uplifted foot for weeks—this foot of the law that hovered over him—this foot that now was just above his head. When the morning wiped out the stars and painted the sky anew, it would descend and crush him. But the hours were so slow in passing—so very, very slow!

And he must play his part to the last. There should be no weakness for him. He would show all these full-grown men how a dwarf could die. Because of this resolution, because of his final effort to be taken seriously, he had boasted in the courtroom. Ah, yes; how he had boasted! How he had dwelt on each one of his crimes!

How vividly he had painted them before the staring eyes of the jurors! Before the awed silence of the people; before the judge—so serious and somber, who had listened intently to his every word!

Yes, they had all listened to him with horror. And yet that was not quite the kind of feeling he had wanted to inspire; not quite the kind of feeling in their

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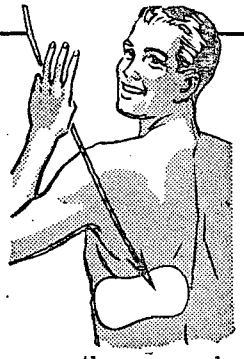

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breasts that he wished were there. They had looked at him with terror, it is true, and yet also with repulsion—a thing apart from others—a repulsion that had almost melted into pity—the sort of pity we feel for a poisonous, crawling thing beneath our foot.

And as he had watched this feeling grow in all these white faces, as he had looked about him on every side, suddenly it had seemed to him that the years had rolled back—that he was once more on his platform in the side show—that the prosecuting attorney was pointing him out to the people, was dwelling on his pitiful size and weakness, as the spieler had used to do.

But now these materialistic children of the world could not laugh at their doll, at their wicked doll gone mad; no, nor could they fear it. It was too wicked to laugh at, too tiny to fear; and it could only be repulsive in a pitiful sort of way—a very disappointing doll, indeed.

And as he had realized that all his life had been wasted; that never, no matter what he did, would he be taken as seriously as others; that he was doomed to die a miniature death as he had lived a miniature life—a puppet pulled into his grave by evil strings—when, as I say, he had realized this fully, he became laughably terrible in the witness stand, railing against God in a shrill squeak, with his tiny fists held high above his head.

And then, for the first time, laughter had echoed through the courtroom—laughter that had been soon hushed, but still laughter—laughter that would ring in the dwarf's ears until death. It was his last message from the world—a message that long ago, with evil fingers, had woven the pattern of his life.

That had been the last day of the trial, the day when Hercules and he had been condemned to death. Now the morning was coming slowly out of the east. It bore a shroud for him in its bosom—a tiny, white shroud.

Why did it not hasten to him as a friend? Didn't it know that he was breaking down at last? That the wicked doll had been discarded by the children with a laugh, and was to be thrown out into the universal dust bin?

Surely it knew these things; then why did it tarry so?

And now a new terror leaped up in Tweedledee's mind; leaped up like a green flame illuminating everything with a ghastly, sickly light.

He realized how lonely he was in this cell, and what a terrible thing it was to die a doll—a mechanical doll. He would have no part in it.

THE time was set, and when the hands of the clock touched that hour—the hour apart from all other hours; the hour beyond which all others vanished, falling into the impenetrable chasm of eternity—when the sentinel before the gates of time struck out this hour with its brazen club; why, ten tall, strange men would come into his cell, would put their great hands on him and carry him away. He might struggle, he might cry out, and it would cause scarcely a ripple in the fast-flowing tide. He was powerless, and he felt that it was bearing him away.

Where was his voice now? It had betrayed him; it had gone out to join the wandering echoes of the world. Only the body and brain would die. Hercules had been loyal to the last, and, sitting in the courtroom, had seemed scarcely conscious of what was going on.

And yet he had received more attention from the people than Tweedledee. They had marveled at his size, his animal ferocity, and his great fists lying clenched upon his knees. Yes, to them he was the one to be taken seriously—not the childish figure by his side.

And Tweedledee, realizing his life's failure, still feared to die. His active mind rushed forward to the barrier of death, and, finding it too high to climb, hurried back again. What was on the other side, waiting for him? Was it possible that his burning egotism would vanish from the world? If not, why was it crying out with such a terrible voice, "I must live! I must live! I must live! I must live!"

He was like a man entering a cold river bathed in obscurity. Behind him is the familiar bank of life; before him a swift, silent current flowing to an unknown sea. Already the water is above his knees. He would turn back, but he is powerless. Something clutches him by the ankle and drags him farther out. It is the hand of time.

Suddenly Tweedledee started. He noticed that the window was growing gray. Shivering slightly, he wondered how long he would have to wait. Brighter and brighter shone the light and, falling on the tiny figure crouching on the bed, rested in his black, beady eyes.

Now the sky was splashed with crimson, a crimson that sifted through the bars

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and touched the dwarf's pale cheeks with nature's coloring.

For a moment he looked like a child again—a child waking up early on Christmas morning to see what Santa Claus has left him.

Soon the prison began to show signs of life. Outside, in the corridor, came the confused sound of muffled footsteps and muttering voices. Somewhere a heavy door shut with a dull clang. The footsteps and voices grew clearer and louder. For a moment they stopped at the dwarf's cell.

"Good-by, Tweedledee," said a deep, rumbling voice. "It's Hercules, and he's going home. I'll wait for you a little while, but hurry—Tweedledee."

The footsteps passed slowly by. They died away at last, and all was stillness. Meanwhile the tiny figure on the bed had not moved or spoken. It was like a large wax doll lying in the morning light.

All was silence in the prison—a dark and brooding silence, the silence that marks the fulfilment of the laws of man. It lasted for several minutes, and then, as a little cloud of smoke rose above the wall, a cry rose with it from a hundred straining throats—a cry that seemed trying to force a passage through the very gates of heaven, to the only just Judge.

Three times this strange cry cut the stillness like a sword and then at last it died away. Thus was Hercules sent forward through the dark portals of the unknown land.

But now other footsteps were sounding in the passage. Again they stopped, but this time the door was opened wide. Tall men entered. They approached the dwarf. "It's your turn now, Tweedledee."

The figure that resembled a waxed doll lying in the sunlight moved. Its lips opened and shut convulsively, and its pointed tongue could be seen vibrating in its mouth. It seemed trying to speak, although not a sound escaped. Perhaps in this last extremity its voice was also dead.

"Come, Tweedledee," said a quiet voice.

The dwarf set his teeth, scowled at the faces looking down at him and tried to rise to his feet. Alas, in this final effort to be taken seriously—to walk bravely to his death like another man—to show these giants how a dwarf could die—his poor pitiful body failed him and, swaying once or twice, he fell headlong to the floor.

Then these men whom he hated, these men whom he had wished to impress by his fortitude, by the exalted strength of his ego, these men bent over him with a look of pity and, picking him up in their strong arms, carried him, half-fainting—a miserable, pathetic figure—to his death.

And there was another solemn silence within the prison walls, another little puff of smoke that glided up into a waiting cloud, another inhuman cry that rose and fell and rose again; then the tragedy was over. Men turned to their daily tasks and soon forgot Tweedledee.

ON THE last night of Tweedledee's life, far out in the country, Echo was walking along a tiny path. On either side, tall pines stretched their bristling arms above the traveler as though to hide him from the curious moon; while before him in the distance, glistening through a maze of tree trunks, lay a sheet of sparkling silver—a luminous lake beneath the stars.

For many nights Echo had wandered through the fields, as happy as the wind at play, following his fitful fancy, dancing in the moonlight, singing in the forest, chasing each stealthy shadow to the skirts of Mother Sorrow, where all such gloomy children should remain.

But in the daytime he was careful not to sing, dance, or shout, for on his shoulder was a little wooden demon—a little wooden demon that whispered in his ear and told him what to do. And he was careful not to disobey it—not to brave the bright sunshine and the passing people, not to look into the eyes of man—for it was his brain that thus commanded and, by obeying, he felt the dark domain, of reason—the domain of Tweedledee—quite vanish at the touch of the rising moon.

Yes, when nature nightly painted that pale portrait in the sky, he was free—free to follow the dancing fireflies through the black and dewy bushes, through the host of silent shadows, through the multitude of tree trunks—to any place where fancy led. And it was at these times that the little wooden demon on his shoulder—the little wooden demon with legs like a goat and the face of an old man—fell fast asleep.

It was useless to ask it questions for it would not answer; no, not until the morning entered through her fiery gates.

The fantastic figure began to bound forward along the little moonlight path, the path between the long rows of silent pine trees that seemed to join hands above it like children in a childish game. Larger and brighter grew the disk of silver, till now the wild, disheveled traveler could

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see the great stars, like jewels, resting on his bosom.

A moment more, and he had broken through the clinging bushes—bushes that with tiny, terror-stricken fingers sought to hold him back. Soon he was lying on the grass looking out over the expanse of water. Not a breath of air caused a ripple on that peaceful surface; not a branch murmured overhead. The tiny lake at this moment—from some great height—must have looked like a drop of dew glistening on a shadowy leaf.

Echo lifted his face toward the sky, and it was as beautiful in the pale moonlight as the face of your own joyous youth. Then he pulled himself slowly forward till his shoulders were over the bank, and fixed his large, luminous eyes on the black silent water beneath.

As he stared down, trying to pierce the shadows, the little wooden demon could be seen nodding on his shoulder. Evidently it had fallen fast asleep.

For some time Echo lay motionless in the soft grass, till finally the moon, rising over the treetops, seemed floating like a golden goblet on the surface of the water beneath his eyes. Then, very slowly and cautiously, a thin shadowy arm reached out above this disc of steady light; groping, nervous fingers tried to seize it, but could not quite reach the glittering prize. The fantastic figure of the traveler writhed forward and the long arm shot out.

For a moment, with open fingers, it hovered above its fancied treasure, and then plunged down with a splash of snow-white foam.

There came a loud, frenzied cry—a cry that seemed echoed by a host of brothers—brothers hiding in the forest; in the treetops, in the valleys—and something long and black rolled off the bank; something that turned the water into gleaming patches of light.

Once more a thin, shadowy arm appeared; an arm that, this time, seemed grasping at the sky. Soon it disappeared; and the foam and tiny waves changed to ripples—ripples that the moon danced on gaily like a silver boat. In turn these ripples subsided slowly; and the silver boat became a pale and agitated face—a face of many lines and wrinkles—the face of age and grief.

A moment later, these lines and wrinkles were erased by the soothing hand of time. And, if another traveler had stood upon the bank looking down, he would have seen nothing in this pale, floating face beneath him—nothing of what had gone before.

ONE beautiful night in August, two figures might have been seen strolling leisurely across a shadowy lawn. Behind them was a large white house, brightly lighted; before them, a little silver lake of flashing waves; above them, a sky of fleecy clouds and flickering stars.

As they drew nearer the lake, now in light and now in shadow, like the personification of two united lives, it was evident that one was a young man in the early twenties, and the other a girl of barely nineteen.

Now they had reached the boardwalk that extended over the water for perhaps twenty yards. Here it ended in a little bridge—a bridge that connected it with a large float.

Here two chairs were placed, so that they looked out, side by side, at the glittering hosts of moonbeams riding on the ripples.

The man and the girl advanced slowly along the wooden walk, looking about them from time to time at the moon-glow on sky and water. Soon they reached the sloping bridge and, descending it, sat down in the two chairs.

For a moment there was silence—a silence broken only by the wind humming through the pine trees, the waves lapping against the float, and the creaking of a loose board. Finally it was the girl who spoke.

"Do you like father's new place, Hector?" she asked.

"Like it?" cried the young man enthusiastically. "Like it? Why, I think it's the most beautiful place that I've ever seen. You can't imagine, Dorothy, how wonderful it seems after what I've been through."

"It must have been terrible, Hector. I know that it was terrible for me just knowing that you were there."

"Yes," said McDonald thoughtfully; "and yet I'm glad I went through it. I don't mean because it made my stories acceptable to the magazines—no, it isn't that. It's because it has made me enjoy life so much more. Life is only very precious when one's in danger of losing it, Dorothy. God creates joy and sorrow in this world by contrast. I learned a lot in prison."

"What, for instance, Hector?"

"Well," said the young man slowly, "I learned about myself, for one thing. Before I went to jail, I considered myself a genius, a man above all others in my profession. You see, being so much alone, I

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had deluded myself with that idea for months. The germ of ego grows and grows in the garden of solitude till sometimes a man goes mad. It is only by encountering others that we can gauge our own strength. But I encountered death, Dorothy; a grisly monster that devours millions of egos, as he has devoured mine."

"It seemed to me that I had starved for nothing; that I was about to die for nothing. I was like some fanatic, at the stake, who at the last moment loses his faith."

"That must have been terrible, Hector," said Dorothy with her dark eyes fixed on the young man's face. "But you do write wonderfully, I know it."

"Women fan the flame only to quench it with their tears," said McDonald. "I grant you this, though. I do write as well as the average. But Dorothy, I hadn't really lived because I hadn't really suffered. Of course I had been hungry now and then, but I had never really suffered with the mind. That's what makes or breaks us.

"For instance, Tweedledee's written confessions, the book that saved my life, Dorothy, well, one page of this is worth more than anything that I've ever written. And why is it? Because he'd suffered, because he'd lived it all—mind and body."

"Perhaps, but I hope you wouldn't be like he was, dear."

"No, I'd never pay that price. But some day he may be taken seriously."

"But Hector, what became of Echo? Didn't they ever find him?"

"No, and I hope they never will. He is probably out in the country somewhere, playing like a child, dancing along with the wind and chasing the wandering shadows home. He told me what he wanted to do, when he was in that little back room at the parrot shop. We had many a long talk together, he and I. God bless, Echo, wherever he may be."

For some time they were silent, looking out over the silver water and listening to the tiny waves lapping against the dock. Suddenly the moon, like a huge silver beetle, broke through a spider web of clouds and, rising higher in the sky, looked down on the lake at its feet. Stretching out from the float was a narrow path of gleaming light, like a giant's mailed arm; and on this luminous path, dancing toward them, riding on the crest of each tiny wave, was a dark object no larger than your hand. Turning, twisting, bobbing up and down, it advanced ever nearer at the touch of the breeze.

McDonald rose to his feet. "Dorothy," said he, "the waters are bringing us something. Perhaps it's a peace offering from the demon of the deep."

He advanced to the edge of the float, knelt on the damp boards and, leaning forward quickly, pulled the little dark object out of the water. For a moment he held it in his hands, examining it carefully by the light of the moon.

"I was right!" he cried at last. "This will bring us luck! I've never seen anything like it before. Perhaps it's the familiar demon that watches over our lives—the demon that protects and guards us in our hours of sleep. Perhaps, with these little wooden fingers, he has unraveled many an ugly knot in my existence—a knot that I never guessed was there."

As he finished speaking he walked over to the girl. He held out, in the palms of his hands, a little water-soaked figure which seemed familiar to both—familiar, yet unaccountably so.

Dorothy gazed at it. "It does look like a demon," she said. "Why, it has legs like a goat and the face of an old man!"

PSORIASIS —is it a SKIN disease?

After years of research, many noted medical scientists have reached an opinion that Psoriasis results from certain internal disorders. A number of physicians have for the last five years been reporting satisfactory treatment of this malady with a new formula called LIPAN—taken *internally*. LIPAN, a combination of glandular substances and vitamins, attacks what is now believed to be the *internal* cause of Psoriasis, and tends to aid in the digestion and assimilation of foods. LIPAN is harmless, non-habit forming, and can be taken with confidence by both young and old. Physician inquiries are invited. Ask your druggist for LIPAN or write us direct for free booklet. Or, order a month's supply of LIPAN—bottle containing 180 tablets—at once, enclosing check or money order for $8.50.

Spirt & Company, Dept. PF-11, Waterbury, Conn.

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Moths and great flying beetles . . . grown huge with the passing of time . . . danced the dance of death above the flames. . . .

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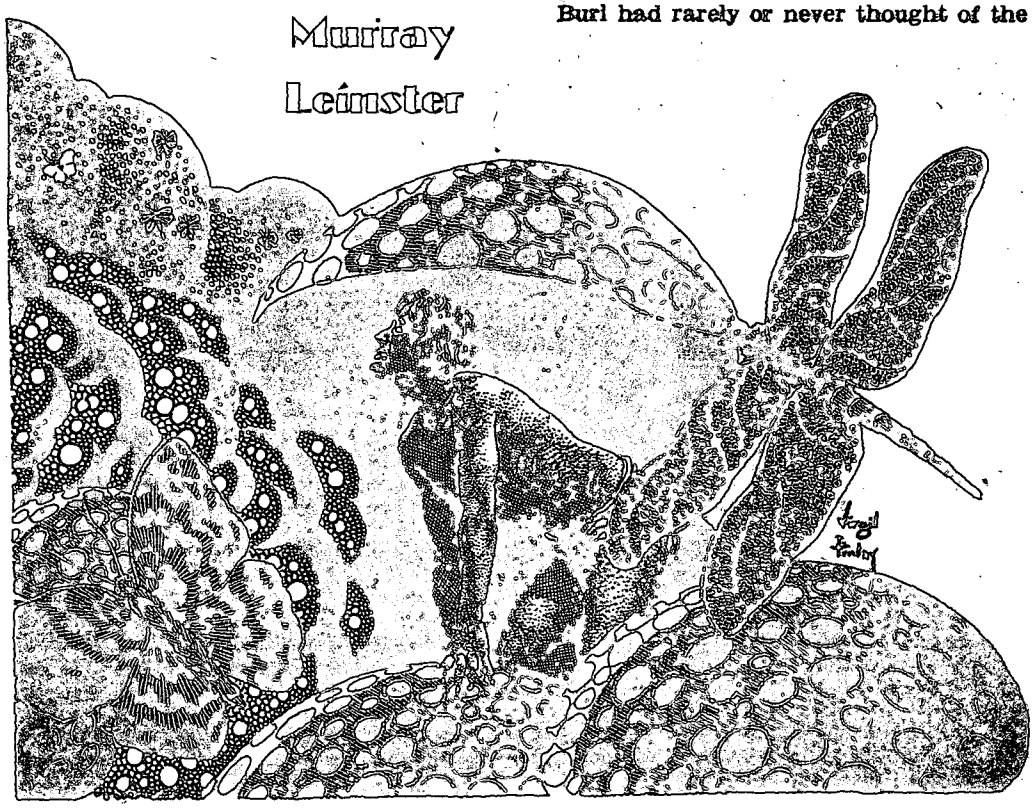
THE MAD PLANET

Picture a world thirty thousand years in the future—a world dominated by insects, where man is a terrified slave. . . . Set sail with Burl down the river of a million perils — and find a new high in fantasy!

By Murray Leinster

IN ALL his lifetime of perhaps twenty years, it had never occurred to Burl to wonder what his grandfather had thought about his surroundings. The grandfather had come to an untimely end in a rather unpleasant fashion which Burl remembered vaguely as a succession of screams coming more and more faintly to his ears while he was being carried away at the top speed of which his mother was capable.

Burl had rarely or never thought of the



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old gentleman since. Surely he had never wondered in the abstract of what his great-grandfather thought, and most surely of all, there never entered his head such a purely hypothetical question as the one of what his many-times-great-grandfather—say of the year 1920—would have thought of the scene in which Burl found himself.

He was treading cautiously over a brownish carpet of fungus growth, creeping furtively toward the stream which he knew by the generic title of "water." It was the only water he knew. Towering far above his head, three man-heights high, great toadstools hid the grayish sky from his sight. Clinging to the foot-thick stalks of the toadstools were still other fungi, parasites upon the growth that had once been parasites themselves.

Burl himself was a slender young man wearing a single garment twisted about his waist, made from the wing-fabric of a great moth the members of his tribe had slain as it emerged from its cocoon. His skin was fair, without a trace of sunburn. In all his lifetime he had never seen the sun, though the sky was rarely hidden from view save by the giant fungi which, with monster cabbages, were the only growing things he knew. Clouds usually spread overhead, and when they did not, the perpetual haze made the sun but an indefinitely brighter part of the sky, never a sharply edged ball of fire. Fantastic mosses, misshapen fungus growths, colossal molds and yeasts, were the essential parts of the landscape through which he moved.

Once as he had dodged through the forest of huge toadstools, his shoulder touched a cream-colored stalk, giving the whole fungus a tiny shock. Instantly, from the umbrella-like mass of pulp overhead, a fine and impalpable powder fell upon him like snow. It was the season when the toadstools sent out their spores, or seeds, and they had been dropped upon him at the first sign of disturbance.

Furtive as he was, he paused to brush them from his head and hair. They were deadly poison, as he knew well.

Burl would have been a curious sight to a man of the twentieth century. His skin was pink, like that of a child, and there was but little hair upon his body. Even that on top of his head was soft and downy. His chest was larger than his forefathers' had been, and his ears seemed almost capable of independent movement, to catch threatening sounds from any direction. His eyes, large and blue, possessed pupils which could dilate to extreme size, allowing him to see in almost complete darkness.

He was the result of the thirty thousand years' attempt of the human race to adapt itself to the change that had begun in the latter half of the twentieth century.

At about that time, civilization had been high, and apparently secure. Mankind had reached a permanent agreement among itself, and all men had equal opportunities to education and leisure. Machinery did most of the labor of the world, and men were only required to supervise its operation. All men were well-fed, all men were well-educated, and it seemed that until the end of time the earth would be the abode of a community of comfortable human beings; pursuing their studies and diversions, their illusions and their truths. Peace, quietness, privacy, freedom were universal.

Then, just when men were congratulating themselves that the Golden Age had come again, it was observed that the planet seemed ill at ease. Fissures opened slowly in the crust, and carbonic acid gas—the carbon dioxide of chemists—began to pour out into the atmosphere. That gas had long been known to be present in the air, and was considered necessary to plant life. Most of the plants of the world took the gas and absorbed its carbon into themselves, releasing the oxygen for use again.

Scientists had calculated that a great deal of the earth's increased fertility was due to the larger quantities of carbon dioxide released by the activities of man in burning his coal and petroleum. Because of those views, for some years no great alarm was caused by the continuous exhalation from the world's interior.

Constantly, however, the volume increased. New fissures constantly opened, each one adding a new source of carbon dioxide, and each one pouring into the already laden atmosphere more of the gas—beneficent in small quantities, but as the world learned, deadly in large ones.

The percentage of the heavy, vapor-like gas increased. The whole body of the air became heavier through its admixture. It absorbed more moisture and became more humid. Rainfall increased. Climates grew warmer. Vegetation became more luxuriant—but the air gradually became less exhilarating.

Soon the health of mankind began to be affected. Accustomed through long ages to breathe air rich in oxygen and poor in carbon dioxide, men suffered. Only those who lived on high plateaus or on tall mountain-tops remained unaffected. The

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plants of the earth, though nourished and increasing in size beyond those ever seen before, were unable to dispose of the continually increasing flood of carbon dioxide.

BY the middle of the twenty-first century it was generally recognized that a new carboniferous period was about to take place, when the earth's atmosphere would be thick and humid, unbreathable by man, when giant grasses and ferns would form the only vegetation.

When the twenty-first century drew to a close the whole human race began to revert to conditions closely approximating savagery. The lowlands were unbearable. Thick jungles of rank growth covered the ground. The air was depressing and ennervating. Men could live there, but it was a sickly, fever-ridden existence. The whole population of the earth desired the high lands and as the low country became more unbearable, men forgot their two centuries of peace.

They fought destructively, each for a bit of land where he might live and breathe. Then men began to die, men who had persisted in remaining near sea-level. They could not live in the poisonous air. The danger zone crept up as the earth-fissures tirelessly poured out their steady streams of foul gas. Soon men could not live within five hundred feet of sea level. The lowlands went uncultivated, and became jungles of a thickness comparable only to those of the first carboniferous period.

Then men died of sheer inanition at a thousand feet. The plateaus and mountaintops were crowded with folk struggling for a foothold and food beyond the invisible menace that crept up, and up—

These things did not take place in one year, or in ten. Not in one generation, but in several. Between the time when the chemists of the International Geophysical Institute announced that the proportion of carbon dioxide in the air had increased from .04 per cent to .1 per cent and the time when at sea-level six per cent of the atmosphere was the deadly gas, more than two hundred years intervened.

Coming gradually, as it did, the poisonous effects of the deadly stuff increased with insidious slowness. First the lassitude, then the heaviness of brain, then the weakness of body. Mankind ceased to grow in numbers. After a long period, the race had fallen to a fraction of its former size. There was room in plenty on the mountaintops—but the danger-level continued to creep up.

There was but one solution. The human body would have to inure itself to the poison, or it was doomed to extinction. It finally developed a toleration for the gas that had wiped out race after race and nation after nation, but at a terrible cost. Lungs increased in size to secure the oxygen on which life depended, but the poison, inhaled at every breath, left the few survivors sickly and filled with a perpetual weariness. Their minds lacked the energy to cope with new problems or transmit the knowledge which in one degree or another, they possessed.

And after thirty thousand years, Burl, a direct descendant of the first president of the Universal Republic, crept through a forest of toadstools and fungus growths. He was ignorant of fire, of metals, of the uses of stone and wood. A single garment covered him. His language was a scanty group of a few hundred labial sounds, conveying no abstractions and few concrete things.

He was ignorant of the uses of wood. There was no wood in the scanty territory furtively inhabited by his tribe. With the increase in heat and humidity the trees had begun to die out. Those of northern climes went first, the oaks, the cedars, the maples. Then the pines—the beeches went early—the cypresses, and finally even the forests of the jungles vanished. Only grasses and reeds, bamboos and their kin, were able to flourish in the new, steaming atmosphere. The thick jungles gave place to dense thickets of grasses and ferns, now become treeferns again.

And then the fungi took their place. Flourishing as never before, flourishing on a planet of torrid heat and perpetual miasma, on whose surface the sun never shone directly because of an ever-thickening bank of clouds that hung sullenly overhead, the fungi sprang up. About the dank pools that festered over the surface of the earth, fungus growths began to cluster. Of every imaginable shade and color, of all monstrous forms and malignant purposes, of huge size and flabby volume, they spread over the land.

The grasses and ferns gave place to them. Squat footstools, flaking molds, evil-smelling yeasts, vast mounds of fungi inextricably mingled as to species, but growing, forever growing and exhaling an odor of dark places.

The strange growths now grouped themselves in forests, horrible travesties on the vegetation they had succeeded. They grew and grew with feverish intensity beneath

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a clouded or a haze-obscured sky, while above them fluttered gigantic butterflies and huge moths, sipping daintily of their corruption.

The insects alone of all the animal world above water, were able to endure the change. They multiplied exceedingly, and enlarged themselves in the thickened air. The solitary vegetation—as distinct from fungus growths—that had survived, was now a degenerate form of the cabbages that had once fed peasants. On those rank, colossal masses of foliage, the stolid grubs and caterpillars ate themselves to maturity, then swung below in strong cocoons to sleep the sleep of metamorphosis from which they emerged to spread their wings and fly.

The tiniest butterflies of former days had increased their span until their gaily colored wings should be described in terms of feet, while the larger emperor moths extended their purple sails to a breadth of yards upon yards. Burl himself would have been dwarfed beneath the overshadowing fabric of their wings.

It was fortunate that they, the largest flying creatures, were harmless or nearly so. Burl's fellow tribesmen sometimes came upon a cocoon just about to open, and waited patiently beside it until the beautiful creature within broke through its matted shell and came out into the sunlight.

Then, before it had gathered energy from the air, and before its wings had swelled to strength and firmness, the tribesmen fell upon it, tearing the filmy, delicate wings from its body and the limbs from its carcass. Then, when it lay helpless before them, they carried away the juicy, meat-filled limbs to be eaten, leaving the still living body to stare helplessly at this strange world through its many faceted eyes, and become a prey to the voracious ants who would soon clamber upon it and carry it away in tiny fragments to their underground city.

NOT all the insect world was so helpless or so unthreatening. Burl knew of wasps almost the length of his own body who possessed stings that were instantly fatal. To every species of wasp, however, some other insect is predestined prey, and the furtive members of Burl's tribe feared them but little, as they sought only the prey to which their instinct led them.

Bees were similarly aloof. They were hard put to it for existence, those bees. Few flowers bloomed, and they were reduced to expedients once considered signs of degeneracy in their race. Bubbling yeasts and fouler things, occasionally the nectarless blooms of the rank, giant cabbages. Burl knew the bees. They droned overhead, nearly as large as he was himself, their bulging eyes gazing at him with abstracted preoccupation. And crickets, and beetles, and spiders—

Burl knew spiders! His grandfather had been the prey of one of the hunting tarantulas, which had leaped with incredible ferocity from his excavated tunnel in the earth. A vertical pit in the ground, two feet in diameter, went down for twenty feet. At the bottom of that lair the black-bellied monster waited for the tiny sounds that would warn him of prey approaching his hiding-place. *(Lycosa fasciata).*

Burl's grandfather had been careless, and the terrible shrieks he uttered as the horrible monster darted from the pit and seized him had lingered vaguely in Burl's mind ever since. Burl had seen, too, the monster webs of another species of spider, and watched from a safe distance as the misshapen body of the huge creature sucked the juices from a three-foot cricket that had become entangled in its trap.

Burl had remembered the strange stripes of yellow and black and silver that crossed upon its abdomen. *(Epiera fasciata).* He had been fascinated by the struggles of the imprisoned insect, coiled in a hopeless tangle of sticky, gummy ropes the thickness of Burl's finger, cast about its body before the spider made any attempt to approach.

Burl knew these dangers. They were a part of his life. It was his accustomedness to them, and that of his ancestors, that made his existence possible. He was able to evade them; so he survived. A moment of carelessness, an instant's relaxation of his habitual caution, and he would be one with his forbears, forgotten meals of long-dead, inhuman monsters.

Three days before, Burl had crouched behind a bulky, shapeless fungus growth while he watched a furious duel between two huge horned beetles. Their jaws, gaping wide, clicked and clashed upon each others' impenetrable armor. Their legs crashed like so many cymbals as their polished surfaces ground and struck against each other. They were fighting over some particularly attractive bit of carrion.

Burl had watched with all his eyes until a gaping orifice appeared in the armor of the smaller of the two. It uttered a shrill cry, or seemed to cry out. The noise was, actually, the tearing of the horny stuff beneath the victorious jaws of the adversary.

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The wounded beetle struggled more and more feebly. At last it collapsed, and the conqueror placidly began to eat the conquered before life was extinct.

Burl waited until the meal was finished, and then approached the scene with caution. An ant—the forerunner of many—was already inspecting the carcass.

Burl usually ignored the ants. They were stupid, short-sighted insects, and not hunters. Save when attacked, they offered no injury. They were scavengers, on the lookout for the dead and dying, but they would fight viciously if their prey were questioned, and they were dangerous opponents. They were from three inches, for the tiny black ants, to a foot for the large termites.

Burl was hasty when he heard the tiny clickings of their limbs as they approached. He seized the sharp-pointed snout of the victim, detached from the body, and fled from the scene.

Later, he inspected his find with curiosity. The smaller victim had been a Minotaur beetle, with a sharp-pointed horn like that of a rhinoceros to reinforce his offensive armament, already dangerous because of his wide jaws. The jaws of a beetle work from side to side, instead of up and down, and this had made the protection complete in no less than three directions.

Burl inspected the sharp, dagger-like instrument in his hand. He felt its point, and it pricked his finger. He flung it aside as he crept to the hiding-place of his tribe. There were only twenty of them, four or five men, six or seven women, and the rest girls and children.

Burl had been wondering at the strange feelings that came over him when he looked at one of the girls. She was younger than Burl — perhaps eighteen — and fleeter of foot than he. They talked together, sometimes, and once or twice Burl shared with her an especially succulent find of foodstuffs.

THE next morning he found the horn where he had thrown it, sticking in the flabby side of a toadstool. He pulled it out, and gradually, far back in his mind, an idea began to take shape. He sat for some time with the thing in his hand, considering it with a far-away look in his eyes. From time to time he stabbed at a toadstool, awkwardly, but with gathering skill. His imagination began to work fitfully. He visualized himself stabbing food with it as the larger beetle had stabbed the former owner of the weapon he had in his hand.

Burl could not imagine himself coping with one of the fighting insects. He could only picture himself, dimly, stabbing something that was food with this death-dealing thing. It was no longer than his arm and though clumsy to the hand, an effective and terribly sharp implement.

He thought: Where was there food, food that lived, that would not fight back? Presently he rose and began to make his way toward the tiny river. Yellow-bellied newts swam in its waters. The swimming larvae of a thousand insects floated about its surface or crawled upon its bottom.

There were deadly things there, too. Giant crayfish snapped their horny claws at the unwary. Mosquitoes of four-inch wingspread sometimes made their humming way above the river. The last survivors of their race, they were dying out for lack of the plant-juices on which the male of the species lived, but even so they were formidable. Burl had learned to crush them with fragments of fungus.

He crept slowly through the forest of toadstools. Brownish fungus was underfoot. Strange orange, red, and purple molds clustered about the bases of the creamy toadstool stalks. Once Burl paused to run his sharp-pointed weapon through a fleshy stalk and reassure himself that what he planned was practicable.

He made his way furtively through the forest of misshapen growths. Once he heard a tiny clicking, and froze into stillness. It was a troop of four or five ants, each some eight inches long, returning along their habitual pathway to their city. They moved sturdily, heavily laden, along the route marked with the black and odorous formic acid exuded from the bodies of their comrades. Burl waited until they had passed, then went on.

He came to the bank of the river. Green scum covered a great deal of its surface, scum occasionally broken by a slowly enlarging bubble of some gas released from decomposing matter on the bottom. In the center of the placid stream the current ran a little more swiftly, and the water itself was visible.

Over the shining current, water-spiders ran swiftly. They had not shared in the general increase of size that had taken place in the insect world. Depending upon the capillary qualities of the water to support them, an increase in size and weight would have deprived them of the means of locomotion.

From the spot where Burl first peered

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at the water the green scum spread out for many yards into the stream. He could not see what swam and wriggled and crawled beneath the evil-smelling covering. He peered up and down the banks.

Perhaps a hundred and fifty yards below, the current came near the shore. An outcropping of rock there made a steep descent to the river, from which yellow shelf-fungi stretched out. Dark red and orange above, they were light yellow below, and they formed a series of platforms above the smoothly flowing stream. Burl made his way cautiously toward them.

On his way he saw one of the edible mushrooms that formed so large a part of his diet, and paused to break from the flabby flesh an amount that would feed him for many days. It was too often the custom of his people to find a store of food, carry it to their hiding place, and then gorge themselves for days, eating, sleeping, and waking only to eat again until the food was gone.

Absorbed as he was in his plan of trying his new weapon, Burl was tempted to return with his booty. He would give Saya of this food, and they would eat together. Saya was the maiden who roused unusual emotions in Burl. He felt strange impulses stirring within him when she was near, a desire to touch her, to caress her. He did not understand.

He went on, after hesitating. If he brought her food, Saya would be pleased, but if he brought her of the things that swam in the stream, she would be still more pleased. Degraded as his tribe had become, Burl was yet a little more intelligent than they. He was an atavism, a throwback to ancestors who had cultivated the earth and subjugated its animals. He had a vague idea of pride, unformed but potent.

No man within memory had hunted or slain for food. They knew of meat, yes, but it had been the fragments left by an insect hunter, seized and carried away by the men before the perpetually alert ant colonies had sent their foragers to the scene.

If Burl did what no man before him had done, if he brought a whole carcass to his tribe, they would envy him. They were preoccupied solely with their stomachs, and after that with the preservation of their lives. The perpetuation of the race came third in their consideration.

They were herded together in a leaderless group, coming to the same hiding place that they might share in the finds of the lucky and gather comfort from their numbers. Of weapons, they had none. They sometimes used stones to crack open the limbs of the huge insects they found partly devoured, cracking them open for the sweet meat to be found inside, but they sought safety from their enemies solely in flight and hiding.

Their enemies were not as numerous as might have been imagined. Most of the meat-eating insects have their allotted prey. The sphex—a hunting wasp—feeds solely upon grasshoppers. Others wasps eat flies only. The pirate-bee eats bumblebees only. Spiders were the principal enemies of man, as they devour with a terrifying impartiality all that falls into their clutches.

Burl reached the spot from which he might gaze down into the water. He lay prostrate, staring into the shallow depths. Once a huge crayfish, as long as Burl's body, moved leisurely across his vision. Small fishes and even the huge newts fled before the voracious creature.

After a long time the tide of underwater life resumed its activity. The wriggling grubs of the dragonflies reappeared. Little flecks of silver swam into view—a school of tiny fish. A larger fish appeared, moving slowly through the water.

Burl's eyes glistened and his mouth watered. He reached down with his long weapon. It barely touched the water. Disappointment filled him, yet the nearness and the apparent practicability of his scheme spurred him on.

He considered the situation. There were the shelf-fungi below him. He rose and moved to a point just above them, then thrust his spear down. They resisted its point. Burl felt them tentatively with his foot, then dared to thrust his weight to them. They held him firmly. He clambered down and lay flat upon them, peering over the edge as before.

The large fish, as long as Burl's arm, swam slowly to and fro below him. Burl had seen the former owner of his spear strive to thrust it into his opponents, and knew that a thrust was necessary. He had tried his weapon upon toadstools—had practiced with it. When the fish swam below him, he thrust sharply downward. The spear seemed to bend when it entered the water, and missed its mark by inches, to Burl's astonishment. He tried again and again.

He grew angry with the fish below him for eluding his efforts to kill it. Repeated strokes had left it untouched, and it was unwary, and did not even try to run away.

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Burl became furious. The big fish came to rest directly beneath his hand. Burl thrust downward with all his strength. This time the spear, entering vertically, did not seem to bend. It went straight down. Its point penetrated the scales of the swimmer below, transfixing that lazy fish completely.

An uproar began. The fish, struggling to escape, and Burl, trying to draw it up to his perch, made a huge commotion. In his excitement Burl did not observe a tiny ripple some distance away. The monster crayfish was attracted by the disturbance, and was approaching.

The unequal combat continued. Burl hung on desperately to the end of his spear. Then there was a tremor in Burl's support, it gave way, and fell into the stream with a mighty splash. Burl went under, his eyes open, facing death. And as he sank, his wide-open eyes saw waved before him the gaping claws of the huge crayfish, large enough to sever a limb with a single stroke of their jagged jaws.

HE OPENED his mouth to scream—a replica of the terrible screams of his grandfather, seized by a black-bellied tarantula years before—but no sound came forth. Only bubbles floated to the surface of the water. He beat the unresisting fluid with his hands—he did not know how to swim. The colossal creature approached leisurely, while Burl struggled helplessly.

His arms struck a solid object, and grasped it convulsively. A second later he had swung it between himself and the huge crustacean. He felt a shock as the mighty jaws closed upon the corklike fungus, then felt himself drawn upward as the crayfish released his hold and the shelf-fungus floated to the surface. Having given way beneath him, it had been carried below him in his fall, only to rise within his reach just when most needed.

Burl's head popped above water and he saw a larger bit of the fungus floating near by. Less securely anchored to the rocks of the river bank than the shelf to which Burl had trusted himself, it had been dislodged when the first shelf gave way. It was larger than the fragment to which Burl clung, and floated higher in the water.

Burl was cool with a terrible self-possession. He seized it and struggled to draw himself on top of it. It tilted as his weight came upon it, and nearly overturned, but he paid no heed. With desperate haste, he clawed with hands and feet until he could draw himself clear of the water, of which he would forever retain a slight fear.

As he pulled himself upon the furry, orange-brown upper surface, a sharp blow struck his foot. The crayfish, disgusted at finding only what was to it a tasteless morsel in the shelf-fungus, had made a languid stroke at Burl's wriggling foot in the water. Failing to grasp the fleshy member, the crayfish retreated, disgruntled and annoyed.

And Burl floated downstream, perched, weaponless and alone, frightened and in constant danger, upon a flimsy raft composed of a degenerate fungus floating soggily in the water. He floated slowly down the stream of a river in whose waters death lurked unseen, upon whose banks was peril, and above whose reaches danger fluttered on golden wings.

It was a long time before he recovered his self-possession, and when he did he looked first for his spear. It was floating in the water, still transfixing the fish whose capture had endangered Burl's life. The fish now floated with its belly upward, all life gone.

So insistent was Burl's instinct for food that his predicament was forgotten when he saw his prey just out of his reach. He gazed at it, and his mouth watered, while his cranky craft went downstream, spinning slowly in the current. He lay flat on the floating fungoid, and strove to reach out and grasp the end of the spear.

The raft tilted and nearly flung him overboard again. A little later he discovered that it sank more readily on one side than on the other. That was due, of course, to the greater thickness—and consequently greater buoyancy—of the part which had grown next the rocks of the river bank.

Burl found that if he lay with his head stretching above that side, it did not sink into the water. He wriggled into this new position, then, and waited until the slow revolution of his vessel brought the spear-shaft near him. He stretched his fingers and his arm, and touched, then grasped it.

A moment later he was tearing strips of flesh from the side of the fish and cramming the oily mess into his mouth with great enjoyment. He had lost his edible mushroom. That danced upon the waves several yards away, but Burl ate contentedly of what he possessed. He did not worry about what was before him. That lay in the future, but suddenly he realized that he was being carried farther and farther from Saya, the maiden of his tribe

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who caused strange bliss to steal over him when he contemplated her.

The thought came to him when he visualized the delight with which she would receive a gift of part of the fish he had caught. He was suddenly stricken with dumb sorrow. He lifted his head and looked longingly at the river banks.

A long, monotonous row of strangely colored fungus growths. No healthy green, but pallid, cream-colored toadstools, some bright orange, lavender, and purple molds, vivid carmine "rusts" and mildews, spreading up the banks from the turgid slime. The sun was not a ball of fire, but merely shone as a bright golden patch in the haze-filled sky, a patch whose limits could not be defined or marked.

In the faintly pinkish light that filtered down through the air, a multitude of flying objects could be seen. Now and then a cricket or a grasshopper made its bullet-like flight from one spot to another. Huge butterflies fluttered gayly above the silent, seemingly lifeless world. Bees lumbered anxiously about, seeking the cross-shaped flowers of the monster cabbages. Now and then a slender-waisted, yellow-stomached wasp flew alertly through the air.

Burl watched them with a strange indifference. The wasps were as long as he himself. The bees, on end, could match his height. The butterflies ranged from tiny creatures barely capable of shading his face to colossal things in the folds of whose wings he could have been lost. And above him fluttered dragonflies, whose long, spindle-like bodies were three times the length of his own.

Burl ignored them all. Sitting there, an incongruous creature of pink skin and soft brown hair upon an orange fungus floating in midstream, he was filled with despondency because the current carried him forever farther and farther from a certain slender-limbed maiden of his tiny tribe, whose glances caused an odd commotion in his breast.

THE day went on. Once, Burl saw upon the blue-green mold that spread upward from the river, a band of large, red Amazon ants, marching in orderly array, to raid the city of a colony of black ants, and carry away the eggs they would find there. The eggs would be hatched, and the small black creatures made the slaves of the brigands who had stolen them.

The Amazon ants can live only by the labor of their slaves, and for that reason are mighty warriors in their world. Later, etched against the steaming mist that overhung everything as far as the eye could reach, Burl saw strangely shaped, swollen branches rearing themselves from the ground. He knew what they were. A hard-rinded fungus that grew upon itself in peculiar mockery of the vegetation that had vanished from the earth.

And again he saw pear-shaped objects above some of which floated little clouds of smoke. They, too, were fungus growths, puffballs, which when touched emit what seems a puff of vapor. These would have towered above Burl's head, had he stood beside them.

And then, as the day drew to an end, he saw in the distance what seemed a range of purple hills. They were tall hills to Burl, some sixty or seventy feet high, and they seemed to be the agglomeration of a formless growth, multiplying its organisms and forms upon itself until the whole formed an irregular, cone-shaped mound. Burl watched them apathetically.

Presently, he ate again of the oily fish. The taste was pleasant to him, accustomed to feed mostly upon insipid mushrooms. He stuffed himself, though the size of his prey left by far the larger part uneaten.

He still held his spear firmly beside him.

It had brought him into trouble, but Burl possessed a fund of obstinacy. Unlike most of his tribe, he associated the spear with the food it had secured, rather than the difficulty into which it had led him. When he had eaten his fill he picked it up and examined it again. The sharpness of its point was unimpaired.

Burl handled it meditatively, debating whether or not to attempt to fish again. The shakiness of his little raft dissuaded him, and he abandoned the idea. Presently he stripped a sinew from the garment about his middle and hung the fish about his neck with it. That would leave him both hands free. Then he sat cross-legged upon the soggily floating fungus, like a pink-skinned Buddha, and watched the shores go by.

Time had passed, and it was drawing near sunset. Burl, never having seen the sun save as a bright spot in the overhanging haze, did not think of the coming of night as "sunset." To him it was the letting down of darkness from the sky.

Today happened to be an exceptionally bright day, and the haze was not as thick as usual. Far to the west, the thick mist turned to gold, while the thicker clouds above became blurred masses of dull red. Their shadows seemed like lavender, from

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the contrast of shades. Upon the still surface of the river, all the myriad tints and shadings were reflected with an incredible faithfulness, and the shining tops of the giant mushrooms by the river brim glowed faintly pink.

Dragonflies buzzed over his head in their swift and angular flight, the metallic luster of their bodies glistening in the rosy light. Great yellow butterflies flew lightly above the stream. Here, there, and everywhere upon the water appeared the shell-formed boats of a thousand caddis flies, floating upon the surface while they might.

Burl could have thrust his hand down into their cavities and seized the white worms that inhabited the strange craft. The huge bulk of a tardy bee droned heavily overhead. Burl glanced upward and saw the long proboscis and the hairy hinder legs with their scanty load of pollen. He saw the great, multiple-lensed eyes with their expression of stupid preoccupation, and even the sting that would mean death alike for him and for the giant insect, should it be used.

The crimson radiance grew dim at the edge of the world. The purple hills had long been left behind. Now the slender stalks of ten thousand round-domed mushrooms lined the river bank, and beneath them spread fungi of all colors, from the rawest red to palest blue, but all now fading slowly to a monochromatic background in the growing dusk.

The buzzing, fluttering, and the flapping of the insects of the day died slowly down, while from a million hiding places there crept out into the deep night soft and furry bodies of great moths, who preened themselves and smoothed their feathery antennae before taking to the air. The strong-limbed crickets set up their thunderous noise—grown gravely bass with the increasing size of the organs by which the sound was made—and then there began to gather on the water those slender spirals of tenuous mist that would presently blanket the stream in a mantle of thin fog.

NIGHT fell. The clouds above seemed to lower and grow dark. Gradually, now a drop and then a drop, now a drop and then a drop, the languid fall of large, warm raindrops that would drip from the moisture-laden skies all through the night began. The edge of the stream became a place where great disks of coolly glowing flame appeared.

The mushrooms that bordered on the river were faintly phosphorescent (*Pleurotus phosphoreus*) and shone coldly upon the "rusts" and flake-fungi beneath their feet. Here and there a ball of lambent flame appeared, drifting idly above the steaming, festering earth.

Thirty thousand years before, men had called them "will-o'-the-wisps," but Burl simply stared at them, accepting them as he accepted all that passed. Only a man attempting to advance in the scale of civilization tries to explain everything that he sees. The savage and the child is most often content to observe without comment, unless he repeats the legends told him by wise folk who are possessed by the itch of knowledge.

Burl watched for a long time. Great fireflies whose beacons lighted up their surroundings for many yards—fireflies Burl knew to be as long as his spear—shed their intermittent glows upon the stream. Softly fluttering wings, in great beats that poured torrents of air upon him, passed above Burl.

The air was full of winged creatures. The night was broken by their cries, by the sound of their invisible wings, by their cries of anguish and their mating calls. Above him and on all sides the persistent, intense life of the insect world went on ceaselessly, but Burl rocked back and forth upon his frail mushroom boat and wished to weep because he was being carried from his tribe, and from Saya—Saya of the swift feet and white teeth, of the shy smile.

Burl may have been homesick, but his principal thoughts were of Saya. He had dared greatly to bring a gift of fresh meat to her, meat captured as meat had never been known to be taken by a member of the tribe. And now he was being carried from her!

He lay, disconsolate, upon his floating atom on the water for a great part of the night. It was long after midnight when the mushroom raft struck gently and remained grounded upon a shallow in the stream.

When the light came in the morning, Burl gazed about him keenly. He was some twenty yards from the shore, and the greenish scum surrounded his now disintegrating vessel. The river had widened out until the other bank was barely to be seen through the haze above the surface of the river, but the nearer shore seemed firm and no more full of dangers than the territory his tribe inhabited. He felt the depth of the water with his spear, then was struck with the multiple usefulness of that weapon. The water would

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come to but slightly above his ankles.

Shivering a little with fear, Burl stepped down into the water, then made for the bank at the top of his speed. He felt a soft something clinging to one of his bare feet. With an access of terror, he ran faster, and stumbled upon the shore in a panic. He stared down at his foot. A shapeless, flesh-colored pad clung to his heel, and as Burl watched, it began to swell slowly, while the pink of its wrinkled folds deepened.

It was no more than a leech, sharing in the enlargement nearly all the lower world had undergone, but Burl did not know that. He thrust at it with the side of his spear, then scraped frantically at it, and it fell off, leaving a blotch of blood upon the skin where it came away. It lay, writhing and pulsating, upon the ground, and Burl fled from it.

He found himself in one of the toadstool forests with which he was familiar, and finally paused, disconsolately. He knew the nature of the fungus growths about him, and presently fell to eating. In Burl the sight of food always produced hunger—a wise provision of nature to make up for the instinct to store food, which he lacked.

Burl's heart was small within him. He was far from his tribe, and far from Saya. In the parlance of this day, it is probable that no more than forty miles separated them, but Burl did not think of distances. He had come down the river. He was in a land he had never known or seen. And he was alone.

All about him was food. All the mushrooms that surrounded him were edible, and formed a store of sustenance Burl's whole tribe could not have eaten in many days, but that very fact brought Saya to his mind more forcibly. He squatted on the ground, wolfing down the insipid mushroom in great gulps, when an idea suddenly came to him with all the force of inspiration.

He would bring Saya here, where there was food, food in great quantities, and she would be pleased. Burl had forgotten the large and oily fish that still hung down his back from the sinew about his neck, but now he rose, and its flapping against him reminded him again.

He took it and fingered it all over, getting his hands and himself thoroughly greasy in the process, but he could eat no more. The thought of Saya's pleasure at the sight of that, too, reinforced his determination.

With all the immediacy of a child or a savage he set off at once. He had come along the bank of the stream. He would retrace his steps along the bank of the stream.

Through the awkward aisles of the mushroom forest he made his way, eyes and ears open for possibilities of danger. Several times he heard the omnipresent clicking of ants on their multifarious businesses in the wood, but he could afford to ignore them. They were short-sighted at best, and at worst they were foragers rather than hunters. He only feared one kind of ant, the army-ant, which sometimes travels in hordes of millions, eating all that it comes upon. In ages past, when they were tiny creatures not an inch long, even the largest animals fled from them. Now that they measured a foot in length, not even the gorged spiders whose distended bellies were a yard in thickness, dared offer them battle.

The mushroom forest came to an end. A cheerful grasshopper *(Ephigger)* munched delicately at some dainty it had found. Its hind legs were bunched beneath it in perpetual readiness for flight. A monster wasp appeared above—as long as Burl himself—poised an instant, dropped, and seized the luckless feaster.

There was a struggle, then the grasshopper became helpless, and the wasp's flexible abdomen curved delicately. Its sting entered the jointed armor of its prey, just beneath the head. The sting entered with all the deliberate precision of a surgeon's scalpel, and all struggle ceased.

The wasp grasped the paralyzed, not dead, insect and flew away. Burl grunted, and passed on. He had hidden when the wasp darted down from above.

The ground grew rough, and Burl's progress became painful. He clambered arduously up steep slopes and made his way cautiously down their farther sides. Once he had to climb through a tangled mass of mushrooms so closely placed, and so small, that he had to break them apart with blows of his spear before he could pass, when they shed upon him torrents of a fiery red liquid that rolled off his greasy breast and sank into the ground *(Lactarius deliciosus)*.

A strange self-confidence now took possession of Burl. He walked less cautiously and more boldly. The mere fact that he had struck something and destroyed it provided him with a curious fictitious courage.

He had climbed slowly to the top of a red clay cliff, perhaps a hundred feet high,

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slowly eaten away by the river when it overflowed. Burl could see the river. At some past floodtime it had lapped at the base of the cliff on whose edge he walked, though now it came no nearer than a quarter-mile.

The cliffside was almost covered with shelf-fungi, large and small, white, yellow, orange, and green, in indescribable confusion and luxuriance. From a point halfway up the cliff the inch-thick cable of a spider's web stretched down to an anchorage on the ground, and the strangely geometrical pattern of the web glistened evilly.

Somewhere among the fungi of the cliffside the huge creature waited until some unfortunate prey should struggle helplessly in its monster snare. The spider waited in a motionless, implacable patience, invincibly certain of prey, utterly merciless to its victims.

Burl strutted on the edge of the cliff, a silly little pink-skinned creature with an oily fish slung about his neck and a draggled fragment of a moth's wing about his middle. In his hand he bore the long spear of a minotaur beetle. He strutted, and looked scornfully down upon the whitely shining trap below him. He struck mushrooms, and they had fallen before him. He feared nothing. He strode fearlessly along. He would go to Saya and bring her to this land where food grew in abundance.

Sixty paces before him, a shaft sank vertically in the sandy, clayey soil. It was a carefully rounded shaft, and lined with silk. It went down for perhaps thirty feet or more, and there enlarged itself into a chamber where the owner and digger of the shaft might rest. The top of the hole was closed by a trap door, stained with mud and earth to imitate with precision the surrounding soil. A keen eye would have been needed to perceive the opening. But a keen eye now peered out from a tiny crack, the eye of the engineer of the underground dwelling.

Eight hairy legs surrounded the body of the creature that hung motionless at the top of the silk-lined shaft. A huge misshapen globe formed its body, colored a dirty brown. Two pairs of ferocious mandibles stretched before its fierce mouth-parts. Two eyes glittered evilly in the darkness of the burrow. And over the whole body spread a rough, mangy fur.

It was a thing of implacable malignance, of incredible ferocity. It was the brown hunting-spider, the American tarantula *(Mygale Hentzii)*. Its body was two feet and more in diameter, and its legs, outstretched, would cover a circle three yards across. It watched Burl, its eyes glistening. Slaver welled up and dropped from its jaws.

And Burl strutted forward on the edge of the cliff, puffed up with a sense of his own importance. The white snare of the spinning spider below him impressed him as amusing. He knew the spider would not leave its web to attack him. He reached down and broke off a bit of fungus growing at his feet. Where he broke it, it was oozing a soupy liquid and was full of tiny maggots in a delirium of feasting. Burl flung it down into the web, and then laughed as the black bulk of the hidden spider swung down from its hiding place to investigate.

THE tarantula, peering from its burrow, quivered with impatience. Burl drew near, and nearer. He was using his spear as a lever, now, and prying off bits of fungus to fall down the cliffside into the colossal web. The spider, below, went leisurely from one place to another, investigating each new missile with its palpi, then leaving them, as they appeared lifeless and undesirable prey. Burl laughed again as a particularly large lump of shelf-fungus narrowly missed the black-and-silver figure below. Then—

The trap door fell into place with a faint click, and Burl whirled about. His laughter turned to a scream. Moving toward him with incredible rapidity, the monster tarantula opened its dripping jaws. Its mandibles gaped wide. The poison fangs were unsheathed. The creature was thirty paces away, twenty paces—ten. It leaped into the air, eyes glittering, all its eight legs extended to seize, fangs bared—

Burl screamed again, and thrust out his arms to ward off the impact of the leap. In his terror, his grasp upon his spear had become agonized. The spear point shot out, and the tarantula fell upon it. Nearly a quarter of the spear entered the body of the ferocious thing.

It struck upon the spear, writhing horribly, still struggling to reach Burl, who was transfixed with horror. The mandibles clashed, strange sounds came from the beast. Then one of the attenuated, hairy legs rasped across Burl's forearm. He gasped in ultimate fear and stepped backward—and the edge of the cliff gave way beneath him.

He hurtled downward, still clutching the

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spear which held the writhing creature from him. Down through space, eyes glassy with panic, the two creatures—the man and the giant tarantula—fell together. There was a strangely elastic crash and crackling. They had fallen into the web beneath them.

Burl had reached the end of terror. He could be no more fear-struck. Struggling madly in the gummy coils of an immense web, which ever bound him more tightly, with a wounded creature shuddering in agony not a yard from him—yet a wounded creature that still strove to reach him with its poison fangs—Burl had reached the limit of panic.

He fought like a madman to break the coils about him. His arms and breast were greasy from the oily fish, and the sticky web did not adhere to them, but his legs and body were inextricably fastened by the elastic threads spread for just such prey as he.

He paused a moment, in exhaustion. Then he saw, five yards away, the silvery and black monster waiting patiently for him to weary himself. It judged the moment propitious. The tarantula and the man were one in its eyes, one struggling thing that had fallen opportunely into its snare. They were moving but feebly now. The spider advanced delicately, swinging its huge bulk nimbly along the web, paying out a cable after it came inexorably toward him.

Burl's arms were free, because of the greasy coating they had received. He waved them wildly, shrieking at the pitiless monster that approached. The spider paused. Those moving arms suggested mandibles that might wound or slap.

Spiders take few hazards. This spider was no exception to the rule. It drew cautiously near, then stopped. Its spinnerets became busy, and with one of its six legs, used like an arm, it flung a sheet of gummy silk impartially over both the tarantula and the man.

Burl fought against the descending shroud. He strove to thrust it away, but in vain. In a matter of minutes he was completely covered in a silken cloth that hid even the light from his eyes. He and his enemy, the giant tarantula, were beneath the same covering, though the tarantula moved but weakly.

The shower ceased. The web-spider had decided that they were helpless. Then Burl felt the cables of the web give slightly, as the spider approached to sting and suck the sweet juices from its prey.

THE web yielded gently as the added weight of the black-bellied spider approached. Burl froze into stillness under his enveloping covering. Beneath the same silken shroud the tarantula writhed in agony upon the point of Burl's spear. It clashed its jaws, shuddering upon the horny barb.

Burl was quiet in an ecstasy of terror. He waited for the poison-fangs to be thrust into him. He knew the process. He had seen the leisurely fashion in which the giant spiders delicately stung their prey, then withdrew to wait without impatience for the poison to do its work.

When their victim had ceased to struggle, they drew near again, and sucked the sweet juices from the body, first from one point and then another, until what had so recently been a creature vibrant with life became a shrunken, withered husk—to be flung from the web at nightfall. Most spiders are tidy housekeepers, destroying their snares daily to spin anew.

The bloated, evil creature moved meditatively about the shining sheet of silk it had cast over the man and the giant tarantula when they fell from the cliff above. Now only the tarantula moved feebly. Its body was outlined by a bulge in the concealing shroud, throbbing faintly as it still struggled with the spear in its vitals. The irregularly rounded protuberance offered a point of attack for the web-spider. It moved quickly forward, and stung.

Galvanized into fresh torment by this new agony, the tarantula writhed in a very hell of pain. Its legs, clustered about the spear still fastened into its body, struck out purposelessly, in horrible gestures of delirious suffering. Burl screamed as one of them touched him, and struggled himself.

His arms and head were free beneath the silken sheet because of the grease and oil that coated them. He clutched at the threads about him and strove to draw himself away from his deadly neighbor. The threads did not break, but they parted one from another, and a tiny opening appeared. One of the tarantula's attenuated limbs touched him again. With the strength of utter panic he hauled himself away, and the opening enlarged. Another struggle, and Burl's head emerged into the open air, and he stared down for twenty feet upon an open space almost carpeted with the chitinous remains of his present captor's former victims.

Burl's head was free, and his breast and arms. The fish slung over his shoulder

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Of every imaginable shape and color, of all monstrous forms and malignant purposes, of huge size and flabby volume, the fungi spread over the land. . . .

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had shed its oil upon him impartially. But the lower part of his body was held firm by the gummy snare of the web-spider, a snare far more tenacious than any birdlime ever manufactured by man.

He hung in his tiny window for a moment, despairing. Then he saw, at a little distance, the bulk of the monster spider, waiting patiently for its poison to take effect and the struggling of its prey to be stilled. The tarantula was no more than shuddering now. Soon it would be still, and the black-bellied creature waiting on the web would approach for its meal.

Burl withdrew his head and thrust desperately at the sticky stuff about his loins and legs. The oil upon his hands kept it from clinging to them, and it gave a little. In a flash of inspiration, Burl understood. He reached over his shoulder and grasped the greasy fish; tore it in a dozen places and smeared himself with the now rancid exudation, pushing the sticky threads from his limbs and oiling the surface from which he had thrust it away.

He felt the web tremble. To the spider, its poison seemed to have failed of effect. Another sting seemed to be necessary. This time it would not insert its fangs into the quiescent tarantula, but would sting where the disturbance was manifest—would send its deadly venom into Burl.

He gasped, and drew himself toward his window. It was as if he would have pulled his legs from his body. His head emerged, his shoulders—half his body was out of the hole.

The colossal spider surveyed him, and made ready to cast more of its silken sheet upon him. The spinnerets became active, and the sticky stuff about Burl's feet gave way! He shot out of the opening and fell sprawling, awkwardly and heavily, upon the earth below, crashing upon the shrunken shell of a flying beetle which had fallen into the snare and had not escaped.

Burl rolled over and over, and then sat up. An angry, foot-long ant stood before him, its mandibles extended threateningly, while its antennae waved wildly in the air. A shrill stridulation filled the air.

In ages past, when ants were tiny creatures of lengths to be measured in fractions of an inch, learned scientists debated gravely if their tribe possessed a cry. They believed that certain grooves upon the body of the insects, after the fashion of those upon the great legs of the cricket, might offer the means of uttering an infinitely high-pitched sound too shrill for man's ears to catch.

Burl knew that the stridulation was caused by the doubtful insect before him, though he had never wondered how it was produced. The cry was used to summon others of its city, to help it in its difficulty or good fortune.

Clickings sounded fifty or sixty feet away. Comrades were coming to aid the pioneer. Harmless save when interfered with—all save the army ant, that is—the whole ant tribe was formidable when aroused. Utterly fearless, they could pull down a man and slay him as so many infuriated fox terriers might have done thirty thousand years before.

BURL fled, without debate, and nearly collided with one of the anchoring cables of the web from which he had barely escaped a moment before. He heard the shrill sound behind him suddenly subside. The ant, short-sighted as all ants were, no longer felt itself threatened and went peacefully about the business Burl had interrupted, that of finding among the gruesome relics beneath the spider's web some edible carrion which might feed the inhabitants of its city.

Burl sped on for a few hundred yards, and stopped. It behooved him to move carefully. He was in strange territory, and as even the most familiar territory was full of sudden and implacable dangers, unknown lands were doubly or trebly perilous.

Burl, too, found difficulty in moving. The glutinous stuff from the spider's shroud of silk still stuck to his feet and picked up small objects as he went along. Old ant-gnawed fragments of insect armour pricked him even through his toughened soles.

He looked about cautiously and removed them, took a dozen steps and had to stop again. Burl's brain had been uncommonly stimulated of late. It had gotten him into at least one predicament—due to his invention of a spear—but had no less readily led to his escape from another. But for the reasoning that had led him to use the grease from the fish upon his shoulder in oiling his body when he struggled out of the spider's snare, he would now be furnishing a meal for that monster.

Cautiously, Burl looked all about him. He seemed to be safe. Then, quite deliberately, he sat down to think. It was the first time in his life that he had done such a thing. The people of his tribe were not given to meditation. But an idea had struck Burl with all the force of inspiration—an abstract idea.

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When he was in difficulties, something within him seemed to suggest a way out. Would it suggest an inspiration now? He puzzled over the problem. Childlike—and savage-like—the instant the thought came to him, he proceeded to test it out. He fixed his gaze upon his foot. The sharp edges of pebbles, of the remains of insect-armour, of a dozen things, hurt his feet when he walked. They had done so ever since he had been born, but never before had his feet been sticky so that the irritation continued with him for more than a single step.

Now he gazed upon his foot, and waited for the thought within him to develop. Meanwhile, he slowly removed the sharp-pointed fragments, one by one. Partly coated as they were with the half-liquid gum from his feet, they clung to his fingers as they had to his feet, except upon those portions where the oil was thick as before.

Burl's reasoning, before, was simple and of the primary order. Where oil covered him, the web did not. Therefore he would coat the rest of himself with oil. Had he been placed in the same predicament again, he would have used the same means of escape. But to apply a bit of knowledge gained in one predicament to another difficulty was something he had not yet done.

A dog may be taught that by pulling on the latchstring of a door he may open it, but the same dog coming to a high and close-barred gate with a latchstring attached, will never think of pulling on this second latchstring. He associates a latchstring with the opening of the door. The opening of a gate is another matter entirely.

Burl had been stirred to one invention by imminent peril. That is not extraordinary. But to reason in cold blood, as he presently did, that oil on his feet would nullify the glue upon his feet and enable him again to walk in comfort—that was a triumph. The inventions of savages are essentially matters of life and death, of food and safety. Comfort and luxury are only produced by intelligence of a high order.

Burl, in safety, had added to his comfort. That was truly a more important thing in his development than almost any other thing he could have done. He oiled his feet.

It was an almost infinitesimal problem, but Burl's struggles with the mental process of reasoning were actual. Thirty thousand years before him, a wise man had pointed out that education is simply training in thought, in efficient and effective thinking. Burl's tribe had been too much preoccupied with food and mere existence to think, and now Burl, sitting at the base of a squat toadstool that all but concealed him, reexemplified Rodin's "Thinker" for the first time in many generations.

For Burl to reason that oil upon the soles of his feet would guard him against sharp stones was as much a triumph of intellect as any masterpiece of art in the ages before him. Burl was learning how to think.

He stood up, walked, and crowed in sheer delight, then paused a moment in awe of his own intelligence. Thirty-five miles from his tribe, naked, unarmed, utterly ignorant of fire, of wood, of any weapons save a spear he had experimented with the day before, abysmally uninformed concerning the very existence of any art or science, Burl stopped to assure himself that he was very wonderful.

Pride came to him. He wished to display himself to Saya, these things upon his feet, and his spear. But his spear was gone.

WITH touching faith in the efficacy of this new pastime, Burl sat promptly down again and knitted his brows. Just as a superstitious person, once convinced that by appeal to a favorite talisman he will be guided aright, will inevitably apply to that talisman on all occasions, so Burl plumped himself down to think.

These questions were easily answered. Burl was naked. He would search out garments for himself. He was weaponless. He would find himself a spear. He was hungry—and would seek food, and he was far from his tribe, so he would go to them. Puerile reasoning, of course, but valuable, because it was consciously reasoning, consciously appealing to his mind for guidance in difficulty, deliberate progress from a mental desire to a mental resolution.

Even in the high civilization of ages before, few men had really used their brains. The great majority of people had depended upon machines and their leaders to think for them. Burl's tribefolk depended on their stomachs. Burl, however, was gradually developing the habit of thinking which makes for leadership and which would be invaluable to his little tribe.

He stood up again and faced upstream, moving slowly and cautiously, his eyes searching the ground before him keenly and his ears alert for the slightest sound of danger. Gigantic butterflies, riotous in coloring, fluttered overhead through the

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misty haze. Sometimes a grasshopper hurtled through the air like a projectile, its transparent wings beating the air frantically. Now and then a wasp sped by, intent upon its hunting, or a bee droned heavily along, anxious and worried, striving in a nearly flowerless world to gather the pollen that would feed the hive.

Here and there Burl saw flies of various sorts, some no larger than his thumb, but others the size of his whole hand. They fed upon the juices that dripped from the maggot-infested mushrooms, when filth more to their liking was not at hand.

Very far away a shrill roaring sounded faintly. It was like a multitude of clickings blended into a single sound, but was so far away that it did not impress itself upon Burl's attention. He had all the strictly localized vision of a child. What was near was important, and what was distant could be ignored. Only the imminent required attention, and Burl was preoccupied.

Had he listened, he would have realized that army ants were aboard in countless millions, spreading themselves out in a broad array and eating all they came upon far more destructively than so many locusts.

Locusts in past ages had eaten all green things. There were only giant cabbages and a few such tenacious rank growths in the world that Burl knew. The locusts had vanished with civilization and knowledge and the greater part of mankind, but the army ants remained as an invincible enemy to men and insects, and the most of the fungus growths that covered the earth.

Burl did not notice the sound, however. He moved forward briskly though cautiously, searching with his eyes for garments, food, and weapons. He confidently expected to find all of them within a short distance.

Surely enough, he found a thicket—if one might call it so—of edible fungi no more than half a mile beyond the spot where he had improvised his sandals to protect the soles of his feet.

Without especial elation, Burl tugged at the largest until he had broken off a food supply for several days. He went on, eating as he did so, past a broad plain a mile and more across, being broken into odd little hillocks by gradually ripening and suddenly developing mushrooms with which he was unfamiliar.

The earth seemed to be in process of being pushed aside by rounded protuberances of which only the tips showed. Blood-red hemispheres seemed to be forcing aside the earth so they might reach the outer air.

Burl looked at them curiously, and passed among them without touching them. They were strange, and to him most strange things meant danger. In any event, he was full of a new purpose now. He wished garments and weapons.

Above the plain a wasp hovered, a heavy object dangling beneath its black belly, ornamented by a single red band. It was a wasp—the hairy sand-wasp—and it was bringing a paralyzed gray caterpillar to its burrow.

Burl watched it drop down with the speed and sureness of an arrow, pull aside a heavy, flat stone, and descend into the ground. It had a vertical shaft dug down for forty feet or more.

It descended, evidently inspected the interior, reappeared, and vanished into the hole again, dragging the gray worm after it. Burl, marching on over the broad plain that seemed stricken with some erupting disease from the number of red pimples making their appearance, did not know what passed below, but observed the wasp emerge again and busily scratch dirt and stones into the shaft until it was full.

The wasp had paralyzed a caterpillar, taken it to the already prepared burrow, laid an egg upon it, and filled up the entrance. In course of time the egg would hatch into a grub barely as long as Burl's forefinger, which would then feed upon the torpid caterpillar until it had waxed large and fat. Then it would weave itself a chrysalis and sleep a long sleep, only to wake as a wasp and dig its way to the open air.

Burl reached the farther side of the plain and found himself threading the aisles of one of the fungus forests in which the growths were hideous, misshapen travesties upon the trees they had supplanted. Bloated, yellow limbs branched off from rounded, swollen trunks. Here and there a pear-shaped puff-ball, Burl's height and half as much again, waited craftily until a chance touch should cause it to shoot upward a curling puff of infinitely fine dust.

BURL went cautiously. There were dangers here, but he moved forward steadily, none the less. A great mass of edible mushroom was slung under one of his arms, and from time to time he broke off a fragment and ate of it, while his large eyes searched this way and that for threats of harm.

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Behind him, a high, shrill roaring had grown slightly in volume and nearness, but was still too far away to impress Burl. The army ants were working havoc in the distance. By thousands and millions, myriads upon myriads, they were foraging the country, clambering upon every eminence, descending into every depression, their antennae waving restlessly and their mandibles forever threateningly extended. The ground was black with them, and each was ten inches and more in length.

A single such creature would be formidable to an unarmed and naked man like Burl, whose wisest move would be flight, but in their thousands and millions they presented a menace from which no escape seemed possible. They were advancing steadily and rapidly, shrill stridulations and a multitude of clickings marking their movements.

The great, helpless caterpillars upon the giant cabbages heard the sound of their coming, but were too stupid to flee. The black multitudes covered the rank vegetables, and tiny but voracious jaws began to tear at the flaccid masses of flesh.

Each creature had some futile means of struggling. The caterpillars strove to throw off their innumerable assailants by writhings and contortions, wholly ineffective. The bees fought their entrance to the gigantic hives with stings and wingbeats. The moths took to the air in helpless blindness when discovered by the relentless throngs of small black insects which reeked of fromic acid and left the ground behind them denuded in every living thing.

Before the oncoming horde was a world of teeming life, where mushrooms and fungi fought with thinning numbers of giant cabbages for foothold. Behind the black multiude was—nothing. Mushrooms, cabbages, bees, wasps, crickets. Every creeping and crawling thing that did not get aloft before the black tide reached it was lost, torn to bits by tiny mandibles. Even the hunting spiders and tarantulas fell before the host of insects, having killed many in their final struggles, but overwhelmed by sheer numbers. And the wounded and dying army ants made food for their sound comrades.

There is no mercy among insects. Only the web-spiders sat unmoved and immovable in their colossal snares, secure in the knowledge that their gummy webs would discourage attempts at invasion along the slender supporting cables.

Surging onward, flowing like a monstrous, murky tide over the yellow, steaming earth, the army ants advanced. Their vanguard reached the river, and recoiled. Burl was perhaps five miles distant when they changed their course, communicating the altered line of march to those behind them in some mysterious fashion of transmitting intelligence.

Thirty thousand years before, scientists had debated gravely over the means of communication among ants. They had observed that a single ant finding a bit of booty too large for him to handle alone would return to the ant-city and return with others. From that one instance they deduced a language of gestures made with the antennae.

Burl had no wise theories. He merely knew facts, but he knew that the ants had some form of speech or transmission of ideas. Now, however, he was moving cautiously along toward the stamping grounds of his tribe, in complete ignorance of the black blanket of living creatures creeping over the ground toward him.

A million tragedies marked the progress of the insect army. There was a tiny colony of mining bees—Zebra bees—a single mother, some four feet long, had dug a huge gallery with some ten cells, in which she laid her eggs and fed her grubs with hard-gathered pollen. The grubs had waxed fat and large, became bees, and laid eggs in their turn, within the gallery their mother had dug out for them.

Ten such bulky insects now foraged busily for grubs within the ancestral home, while the founder of the colony had grown draggled and wingless with the passing of time. Unable to forage, herself, the old bee became the guardian of the nest or hive, as is the custom among the mining bees. She closed the opening of the hive with her head, making a living barrier within the entrance, and withdrawing to give entrance and exit only to duly authenticated members of the extensive colony.

The ancient and draggled concierge of the underground dwelling was at her post when the wave of army ants swept over her. Tiny, evil-smelling feet trampled upon her. She emerged to fight with mandible and sting for the sanctity of the hive. In a moment she was a shaggy mass of biting ants, rending and tearing at her chitinous armour. The old bee fought madly, viciously, sounding a buzzing alarm to the colonists yet within the hive. They emerged, fighting as they came, for the gallery leading down was a dark flood of small insects.

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FOR a few moments a battle such as would make an epic was in progress. Ten huge bees, each four to five feet long, fighting with legs and jaw, wing and mandible, with all the ferocity of as many tigers. The tiny, vicious ants covered them, snapping at their multiple eyes, biting at the tender joints in their armour—sometimes releasing the larger prey to leap upon an injured comrade wounded by the huge creature they battled in common.

The fight, however, could have but one ending. Struggle as the bees might, herculean as their efforts might be, they were powerless against the incredible numbers of their assailants, who tore them into tiny fragments and devoured them. Before the last shred of the hive's defenders had vanished, the hive itself was gutted alike of the grubs it had contained and the food brought to the grubs by such weary effort of the mature bees.

The army ants went on. Only an empty gallery remained, that and a few fragments of tough armour, unappetizing even to the omniverous ants.

Burl was meditatively inspecting the scene of a recent tragedy, where rent and scraped fragments of a great beetle's shiny casing lay upon the ground. A greater beetle had come upon the first and slain him. Burl was looking upon the remains of the meal.

Three or four minims, little ants barely six inches long, foraged industriously among the bits. A new ant city was to be formed and the queen-ant lay hidden a half-mile away. These were the first hatchlings, who would feed the larger ants on whom would fall the great work of the ant-city. Burl ignored them, searching with his eyes for a spear or weapon.

Behind him the clicking roar, the high-pitched stridulations of the horde of army ants, rose in volume. Burl turned disgustedly away. The best he could find in the way of a weapon was a fiercely toothed hind leg. He picked it up, and an angry whine rose from the ground.

One of the black minims was working busily to detach a fragment of flesh from the joint of the leg, and Burl had snatched the morsel from him. The little creature was hardly half a foot in length, but it advanced upon Burl, shrilling angrily. He struck it with the leg and crushed it. Two of the other minims appeared, attracted by the noise the first had made. Discovering the crushed body of their fellow, they unceremoniously dismembered it and bore it away in triumph.

Burl went on, swinging the toothed limb in his hand. It made a fair club, and Burl was accustomed to use stones to crush the juicy legs of such giant crickets as his tribe sometimes came upon. He formed a half-defined idea of a club. The sharp teeth of the thing in his hand made him realize that a sidewise blow was better than a spearlike thrust.

The sound behind him had become a distant whispering, high-pitched, and growing nearer. The army ants swept over a mushroom forest, and the yellow, umbrella-like growths swarmed with black creatures devouring the substance on which they found a foothold.

A great bluebottle fly, shining with a metallic luster, reposed in an ecstasy of feasting, sipping through its long proboscis the dark-colored liquid that dripped slowly from a mushroom. Maggots filled the mushroom, and exuded a solvent pepsin that liquefied the white firm "meat."

They fed upon this soup, this gruel, and a surplus dripped to the ground below, where the bluebottle drank eagerly. Burl drew near, and struck. The fly collapsed into a writhing heap. Burl stood over it for an instant, pondering.

The army ants came nearer, down into a tiny valley, swarming into and through a little brook over which Burl had leaped. Ants can remain under water for a long time without drowning, so the small stream was but a minor obstacle, though the current of water swept many of them off their feet until they choked the brook-bed, and their comrades passed over their struggling bodies dry-shod. They were no more than temporarily annoyed, however, and presently crawled out to resume their march.

About a quarter of a mile to the left of Burl's line of march, and perhaps a mile behind the spot where he stood over the dead bluebottle fly, there was a stretch of an acre or more where the giant, rank cabbages had so far resisted the encroachments of the ever present mushrooms. The pale, cross-shaped flowers of the cabbages formed food for many bees, and the leaves fed numberless grubs and worms, and loud-voiced crickets which crouched about on the ground, munching busily at the succulent green stuff. The army ants swept into the green area, ceaselessly devouring all they came upon.

A terrific din arose. The crickets hurtled away in a rocketlike flight, in a dark cloud of wildly beating wings. They shot aimlessly in any direction, with the result that

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half, or more than half, fell in the midst of the black tide of devouring insects and were seized as they fell. They uttered terrible cries as they were being torn to bits. Horrible inhuman screams reached Burl's ears.

A single such cry of agony would not have attracted Burl's attention—he lived in the very atmosphere of tragedy—but the chorus of creatures in torment made him look up. This was no minor horror. Wholesale slaughter was going on. He peered anxiously in the direction of the sound.

A wild stretch of sickly yellow fungus, here and there interspersed with a squat toadstool or a splash of vivid color where one of the many "rusts" had found a foothold. To the left a group of awkward, misshapen fungoids clustered in silent mockery of a forest of trees. There a mass of faded green, where the giant cabbages stood.

With the true sun never shining upon them save through a blanket of thick haze or heavy clouds, they were pallid things, but they were the only green things Burl had seen. Their nodding white flowers with four petals in the form of a cross glowed against the yellowish green leaves. But as Burl gazed toward them, the green became slowly black.

From where he stood, Burl could see two or three great grubs in lazy contentment, eating ceaselessly on the cabbages on which they rested. Suddenly first one and then the other began to jerk spasmodically. Burl saw that about each of them a tiny rim of black had clustered. Tiny black notes milled over the green surfaces of the cabbages. The grubs became black, the cabbages became black. Horrible contortions of the writhing grubs told of the agonies they were enduring. Then a black wave appeared at the further edge of the stretch of the sickly yellow fungus, a glistening, living wave, that moved forward rapidly with the roar of clickings and a persistent overtone of shrill stridulations.

The hair rose upon Burl's head. He knew what this was! He knew all too well the meaning of that tide of shining bodies. With a gasp of terror, all his intellectual preoccupations forgotten, he turned and fled in ultimate panic. And the tide came slowly on after him.

HE FLUNG away the great mass of edible mushroom, but clung to his sharp-toothed club desperately, and darted through the tangled aisles of the little mushroom forest with a heedless disregard of the dangers that might await him there. Flies buzzed about him loudly, huge creatures, glittering with a metallic luster. Once he was struck upon the shoulder by the body of one of them, and his skin was torn by the swiftly vibrating wings of the insect, as long as Burl's hand.

Burl thrust it away and sped on. The oil with which he was partly covered had turned rancid, now, and the odor attracted them, connoisseurs of the fetid. They buzzed over his head, keeping pace even with his headlong flight.

A heavy weight settled upon his head, and in a moment was doubled. Two of the creatures had dropped upon his oily hair, to sip the rancid oil through their disgusting proboscises. Burl shook them off with his hand and ran madly on. His ears were keenly attuned to the sound of the army ants behind him, and it grew but little farther away.

The clicking roar continued, but began to be overshadowed by the buzzing of the flies. In Burl's time the flies had no great heaps of putrid matter in which to lay their eggs. The ants—busy scavengers—carted away the debris of the multitudinous tragedies of the insect world long before it could acquire the gamey flavor beloved by the fly maggots. Only in isolated spots were the flies really numerous, but there they clustered in clouds that darkened the sky.

Such a buzzing, whirling cloud surrounded the madly running figure of Burl. It seemed as though a miniature whirlwind kept pace with the little pink-skinned man, a whirlwind composed of winged bodies and multi-faceted eyes. He twirled his club before him, and almost every stroke was interrupted by an impact against a thinly armored body which collapsed with a spurting of reddish liquid.

An agonizing pain as of a red-hot iron struck upon Burl's back. One of the stinging flies had thrust its sharp-tipped proboscis into Burl's flesh to suck the blood.

Burl uttered a cry and—ran full tilt into the thick stalk of a blackened and draggled toadstool. There was a curious crackling as of wet punk or brittle rotten wood. The toadstool collapsed upon itself with a strange splashing sound. Many flies had laid their eggs in the fungoid, and it was a teeming mass of corruption and ill-smelling liquid.

With the crash of the toadstool's "head" upon the ground, it fell into a dozen pieces, and the earth for yards around was spattered with a stinking liquid in which tiny,

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headless maggots twitched convulsively.

The buzzing of the flies took on a note of satisfaction, and they settled by hundreds about the edges of the ill-smelling pools, becoming lost in the ecstasy of feasting while Burl staggered to his feet and darted off again. This time he was but a minor attraction to the flies, and but one or two came near him. From every direction they were hurrying to the toadstool feast, to the banquet of horrible, liquefied fungus that lay spread upon the ground.

Burl ran on. He passed beneath the wide-spreading leaves of a giant cabbage. A great grasshopper crouched upon the ground, its tremendous jaws crunching the rank vegetation voraciously. Half a dozen great worms ate steadily from their resting-places among the leaves. One of them had slung itself beneath an overhanging leaf—which would have thatched a dozen homes for as many men—and was placidly anchoring itself in preparation for the spinning of a cocoon in which to sleep the sleep of metamorphosis.

A mile away, the great black tide of army ants was advancing relentlessly. The great cabbage, the huge grasshopper, and all the stupid caterpillars upon the wide leaves would soon be covered with the tiny biting insects. The cabbage would be reduced to a chewed and destroyed stump, the colossal, furry grubs would be torn into a myriad mouthfuls and devoured by the black army ants, and the grasshopper would strike out with terrific, unguided strength, crushing its assailants by blows of its power hind legs and bites of its great jaws. But it would die, making terrible sounds of torment as the vicious mandibles of the army ants found crevices in its armor.

The clicking roar of the ants' advance overshadowed all other sounds, now. Burl was running madly, his breath coming in great gasps, his eyes wide with panic. Alone of all the world about him, he knew the danger behind. The insects he passed were going about their business with that terrifying efficiency found only in the insect world.

THERE is something strangely daunting in the actions of an insect. It moves so directly, with such uncanny precision, with such utter indifference to anything but the end in view. Cannibalism is a rule, almost without exception. The paralysis of prey, so it may remain alive and fresh—though in agony—for weeks on end, is a common practice. The eating piecemeal of still living victims is a matter of course.

Absolute mercilessness, utter callousness, incredible inhumanity beyond anything known in the animal world is the natural and commonplace practice of the insects. And these vast cruelties are performed by armored, machine-like creatures with an abstraction and a routine air that suggests a horrible Nature behind them all.

Burl nearly stumbled upon a tragedy. He passed within a dozen yards of a space where a female dung-beetle was devouring the mate whose honeymoon had begun that same day and ended in that gruesome fashion. Hidden behind a clump of mushrooms, a great yellow-banded spider was coyly threatening a smaller male of her own species. He was discreetly ardent, but if he won the favor of the gruesome creature he was wooing, he would furnish an appetizing meal for her some time within twenty-four hours.

Burl's heart was pounding madly. The breath whistled in his nostrils—and behind him, the wave of army ants was drawing nearer. They came upon the feasting flies. Some took to the air and escaped, but others were too engrossed in their delicious meal. The twitching little maggots, stranded upon the earth by the scattering of their soupy broth, were torn in pieces. The flies who were seized vanished into tiny maws. The serried ranks of black insects went on.

The tiny clickings of their limbs, the perpetual challenges and cross-challenges of crossed antennae, the stridulations of the creatures, all combined to make a high-pitched but deafening din. Now and then another sound pierced the noises made by the ants themselves. A cricket, seized by a thousand tiny jaws, uttered cries of agony. The shrill note of the crickets had grown deeply bass with the increase in size of the organs that uttered it.

There was a strange contrast between the ground before the advancing horde and that immediately behind it. Before, a busy world, teeming with life. Butterflies floating overhead on lazy wings, grubs waxing fat and huge upon the giant cabbages, crickets eating, great spiders sitting quietly in their lairs waiting with invincible patience for prey to draw near their trap doors or fall into their webs, colossal beetles lumbering heavily through the mushroom forests, seeking food, making love in monstrous, tragic fashion.

And behind the wide belt of army ants—chaos. The edible mushrooms gone. The

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giant cabbages left as mere stumps of unappetizing pulp, the busy life of the insect world completely wiped out save for the flying creatures that fluttered helplessly over an utterly changed landscape. Here and there little hands of stragglers moved busily over the denuded earth, searching for some fragment of food that might conceivably have been overlooked by the main body.

Burl was putting forth his last ounce of strength. His limbs trembled, his breathing was agony, sweat stood out upon his forehead. He ran a little, naked man with the disjointed fragment of a huge insect's limb in his hand, running for his insignificant life, running as if his continued existence among the million tragedies of that single day were the purpose for which the whole of the universe had been created.

He sped across an open space a hundred yards across. A thicket of beautifully golden mushrooms *(Agaricus caesareus)* barred his way. Beyond the mushrooms a range of strangely colored hills began, purple and green and black and gold, melting into each other, branching off from each other, inextricably tangled.

They rose to a height of perhaps sixty or seventy feet, and above them a little grayish haze had gathered. There seemed to be a layer of tenuous vapor upon their surfaces, which slowly rose and coiled, and gathered into a tiny cloudlet above their tips.

The hills, themselves, were but masses of fungus, mushrooms and rusts, fungoids of every description, yeasts, "musts," and every form of fungus growth which had grown within itself and about itself until this great mass of strangely colored, spongy stuff had gathered in a mass that undulated unevenly across the level earth for miles.

Burl burst through the golden thicket and attacked the ascent. His feet sank into the spongy sides of the hillock. Panting, gasping, staggering from exhaustion, he made his way up the top. He plunged into a little valley on the farther side, up another slope. For perhaps ten minutes he forced himself on, then collapsed. He lay, unable to move further, in a little hollow, his sharp-toothed club still clasped in his hands. Above him, a bright yellow butterfly with a thirty-foot spread of wing, fluttered lightly.

He lay motionless, breathing in great gasps, his limbs stubbornly refusing to lift him.

THE SOUND of the army ants continued to grow near. At last, above the crest of the last hillock he had surmounted, two tiny antennae appeared, then the black glistening head of an army ant, the forerunner of its horde. It moved deliberately forward, waving its antennae ceaselessly. It made its way toward Burl, tiny clickings coming from the movements of its limbs.

A little wisp of tenuous vapor swirled toward the ant, a wisp of the same vapor that had gathered above the whole range of hills as a thin, low cloud. It enveloped the insect—and the ant seemed to be attacked by a strange convulsion. Its legs moved aimlessly. It threw itself desperately about. If it had been an animal, Burl would have watched with wondering eyes while it coughed and gasped, but it was an insect breathing through air-holes in its abdomen. It writhed upon the spongy fungus growth across which it had been moving.

Burl, lying in an exhausted, panting heap upon the purple mass of fungus, was conscious of a strange sensation. His body felt strangely warm. He knew nothing of fire or the heat of the sun, and the only sensation of warmth he had ever known was that caused when the members of his tribe had huddled together in their hiding place when the damp chill of the night had touched their soft-skinned bodies. Then the heat of their breaths and their bodies had kept out the chill.

This heat that Burl now felt was a hotter, fiercer heat. He moved his body with a tremendous effort, and for a moment the fungus was cool and soft beneath him. Then, slowly, the sensation of heat began again, and increased until Burl's skin was red and inflamed from the irritation.

The thin and tenuous vapor, too, made Burl's lungs smart and his eyes water. He was breathing in great, choking gasps, but the period of rest—short as it was—had enabled him to rise and stagger on. He crawled painfully to the top of the slope, and looked back.

The hill-crest on which he stood was higher than any of those he had passed in his painful run, and he could see clearly the whole of the purple range. Where he was, he was near the farther edge of the range, which was here perhaps half a mile wide.

It was a ceaseless, undulating mass of hills and hollows, ridges and spurs, all of them colored, purple and brown and golden-yellow, deepest black and dingy white. And from the tips of most of the

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pointed hills little wisps of vapor rose up.

A thin, dark cloud had gathered overhead. Burl could look to the right and left, and see the hills fading into the distance, growing fainter as the haze above them seemed to grow thicker. He saw, too, the advancing cohorts of the army ants, creeping over the tangled mass of fungus growth. They seemed to be feeding as they went, upon the fungus that had gathered into these incredible monstrosities.

The hills were living. They were not upheavals of the ground, they were festering heaps of insanely growing, festering mushrooms and fungus. Upon most of them a purple mould had spread itself so that they seemed a range of purple hills, but here and there patches of other vivid colors showed, and there was a large hill whose whole side was a brilliant golden hue. Another had tiny bright red spots of a strange and malignant mushroom whose properties Burl did not know, scattered all over the purple with which it was covered.

Burl leaned heavily upon his club and watched dully. He could run no more. The army ants were spreading everywhere over the mass of fungus. They would reach him soon.

Far to the right the vapor thickened. A column of smoke arose. What Burl did not know and would never know was that far down in the interior of that compressed mass of fungus, slow oxidization had been going on. The temperature of the interior had been raised. In the darkness and the dampness deep down in the hills, spontaneous combustion had begun.

Just as the vast piles of coal the railroad companies of thirty thousand years before had gathered together sometimes began to burn fiercely in their interiors, and just as the farmers' piles of damp straw suddenly burst into fierce flames from no cause, so these huge piles of tinder like mushrooms had been burning slowly within themselves.

There had been no flames, because the surface remained intact and nearly airtight. But when the army ants began to tear at the edible surfaces despite the heat they encountered, fresh air found its way to the smouldering masses of fungus. The slow combustion became rapid combustion. The dull heat became fierce flames. The slow trickle of thin smoke became a huge column of thick, choking, acrid stuff that set the army ants that breathed it into spasms of convulsive writhing.

From a dozen points the flames burst out. A dozen or more columns of blinding smoke rose to the heavens. A pall of fume-laden smoke gathered above the range of purple hills, while Burl watched apathetically. And the serried ranks of army ants marched on to the widening furnaces that awaited them.

They had recoiled from the river, because their instinct had warned them. Thirty thousand years without danger from fire, however, had let their racial fear of fire die out. They marched into the blazing orifices they had opened in the hills, snapping with their mandibles at the leaping flames, springing at the glowing tinder.

THE blazing areas widened, as the purple surface was undermined and fell in. Burl watched the phenomenon without comprehension and even without thankfulness. He stood, panting more and more slowly, breathing more and more easily, until the glow from the approaching flames reddened his skin and the acrid smoke made tears flow from his eyes.

Then he retreated slowly, leaning on his club and looking back. The black wave of the army ants was sweeping into the fire, sweeping into the incredible heat of that carbonized material burning with an open flame. At last there were only the little bodies of stragglers from the great ant-army, scurrying here and there over the ground their comrades had denuded of all living things. The bodies of the main army had vanished—burnt to crisp ashes in the furnace of the hills.

There had been agony in that flame, dreadful agony such as no man would like to dwell upon. The insane courage of the ants, attacking with their horny jaws the burning masses of fungus, rolling over and over with a flaming missile clutched in their mandibles, sounding their shrill war cry while cries of agony came from them—blinded, their antennae burnt off, their lidless eyes scorched by the licking flames; yet going madly forward on flaming feet to attack, ever attack this unknown and unknowable enemy.

Burl made his way slowly over the hills. Twice he saw small bodies of the army ants. They had passed between the widening surfaces their comrades had opened, and they were feeding voraciously upon the hills they trod on. Once Burl was spied, and a shrill war cry was sounded, but he moved on, and the ants were busily eating. A single ant rushed toward him. Burl brought down his club, and a writhing body remained to be eaten later

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by its comrades when they came upon it.

Again night fell. The sky grew red in the west, though the sun did not shine through the ever present cloud bank. Darkness spread across the sky. Utter blackness fell over the whole mad world, save where the luminous mushrooms shed their pale light upon the ground and fireflies the length of Burl's arm shed their fitful gleams upon an earth of fungus growths and monstrous insects.

Burl made his way across the range of mushroom hills, picking his path with his large blue eyes whose pupils expanded to great size. Slowly, from the sky, now a drop and then a drop, now a drop and then a drop, the nightly rain that would continue until daybreak began.

Burl found the ground hard beneath his feet. He listened keenly for sounds of danger. Something rustled heavily in a thicket of mushrooms a hundred yards away. There were sounds of preening, and of delicate feet placed lightly here and there upon the ground. Then the throbbing beat of huge wings began suddenly, and a body took to the air.

A fierce, down-coming current of air smote Burl, and he looked upward in time to catch the outline of a huge body—a moth—as it passed above him. He turned to watch the line of its flight, and saw a strange glow in the sky behind him. The mushroom hills were still burning.

He crouched beneath a squat toadstool and waited for the dawn, his club held tightly in his hands, and his ears alert for any sound of danger. The slow-dropping, sodden rain kept on. It fell with irregular, drumlike beats upon the tough top of the toadstool under which he had taken refuge.

Slowly, slowly, the sodden rainfall continued. Drop by drop, all the night long, the warm pellets of liquid came from the sky. They boomed upon the hollow heads of the toadstools, and splashed into the steaming pools that lay festering all over the fungus-covered earth.

And all the night long the great fires grew and spread in the mass of already half-carbonized mushroom. The flare at the horizon grew brighter and nearer. Burl, naked and hiding beneath a huge mushroom, watched it grow near him with wide eyes, wondering what this thing was. He had never seen a flame before.

The overhanging clouds were brightened by the flames. Over a stretch at least a dozen miles in length and from half a mile to three miles across, seething furnaces sent columns of dense smoke up to the roof of clouds, luminous from the glow below them, and spreading out and forming an intermediate layer below the cloudbanks.

It was like the glow of all the many lights of a vast city thrown against the sky—but the last great city had moulded into fungus-covered rubbish thirty thousand years before. Like the flitting of airplanes above a populous city, too, was the flitting of fascinated creatures above the glow.

MOTHS and great flying beetles, gigantic gnats and midges grown huge with the passing of time, they fluttered and danced the dance of death above the flames. As the fire grew nearer to Burl, he could see them.

Colossal, delicately formed creatures swooped above the strange blaze. Moths with their riotously colored wings of thirty-foot spread beat the air with mighty strokes, and their huge eyes glowed like carbuncles as they stared with the frenzied gaze of intoxicated devotees into the glowing flames below them.

Burl saw a great peacock moth soaring above the burning mushroom hills. Its wings were all of forty feet across, and fluttered like gigantic sails as the moth gazed down at the flaming furnace below. The separate flames had united, now, and a single sheet of white-hot burning stuff spread across the country for miles, sending up its clouds of smoke, in which and through which the fascinated creatures flew.

Feathery antennae of the finest lace spread out before the head of the peacock moth, and its body was softest, richest velvet. A ring of snow-white down marked where its head began, and the red glow from below smote on the maroon of its body with a strange effect.

For one instant it was outlined clearly. Its eyes glowed more redly than any ruby's fire, and the great, delicate wings were poised in flight. Burl caught the flash of the flames upon two great iridescent spots upon the wide-spread wings. Shining purple and vivid red, the glow of opal and the sheen of pearl, all the glory of chalcedony and chrysoprase formed a single wonder in the red glare of burning fungus. White smoke compassed the great moth all about, dimming the radiance of its gorgeous dress.

Burl saw it dart straight into the thickest and brightest of the licking flames, flying madly, eagerly, into the searing, hellish heat as a willing, drunken sacrifice to the god of fire.

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Monster flying beetles with their horny wing-cases stiffly stretched, blundered above the reeking, smoking pyre. In the red light from before them they shone like burnished metal, and their clumsy bodies with the spurred and fierce-toothed limbs darted like so many grotesque meteors through the luminous haze of ascending smoke.

Burl saw strange collisions and still stranger meetings. Male and female flying creatures circled and spun in the glare, dancing their dance of love and death in the wild radiance from the funeral pyre of the purple hills. They mounted higher than Burl could see, drunk with the ecstasy of living, then descended to plunge headlong to death in the roaring fires beneath them.

From every side the creatures came. Moths of brightest yellow with soft and furry bodies palpitant with life flew madly into the column of light that reached to the overhanging clouds, then moths of deepest black with gruesome symbols upon their wings came swiftly to dance, like motes in a bath of sunlight, above the glow.

And Burl sat crouched beneath an overshadowing toadstool and watched. The perpetual, slow, sodden raindrops fell. A continual faint hissing penetrated the sound of the fire—the raindrops being turned to steam. The air was alive with flying things. From far away, Burl heard a strange, deep bass muttering. He did not know the cause, but there was a vast swamp, of the existence of which he was ignorant, some ten or fifteen miles away, and the chorus of insect-eating giant frogs reached his ears even at that distance.

The night wore on, while the flying creatures above the fire danced and died, their numbers ever recruited by fresh arrivals. Burl sat tensely still, his wide eyes watching everything, his mind groping for an explanation of what he saw. At last the sky grew dimly gray, then brighter, and day came on. The flames of the burning hills grew faint as the fire died down, and after a long time Burl crept from his hiding place and stood erect.

A hundred yards from where he was, a straight wall of smoke rose from the still smoldering fungus, and Burl could see it stretching for miles in either direction. He turned to continue on his way, and saw the remains of one of the tragedies of the night.

A huge moth had flown into the flames, been horribly scorched, and floundered out again. Had it been able to fly, it would have returned to its devouring deity, but now it lay immovable upon the ground, its antennae seared hopelessly, one beautiful, delicate wing burned in gaping holes, its eyes dimmed by flame and its exquisitely tapering limbs broken and crushed by the force with which it had struck the ground. It lay helpless upon the earth, only the stumps of its antennae moving restlessly, and its abdomen pulsating slowly as it drew pain-racked breaths.

Burl drew near and picked up a stone. He moved on presently, a velvet cloak cast over his shoulders, gleaming with all the colors of the rainbow. A gorgeous mass of soft, blue moth fur was about his middle, and he had bound upon his forehead two yard-long, golden fragments of the moth's magnificent antennae. He strode on, slowly, clad as no man had been clad in all the ages.

After a little he secured a spear and took up his journey to Saya, looking like a prince of Ind upon a bridal journey—though no mere prince ever wore such raiment in days of greatest glory.

FOR many long miles Burl threaded his way through a single forest of thin-stalked toadstools. They towered three-man-heights high, and all about their bases were streaks and splashes of the rusts and molds that preyed upon them. Twice Burl came to open glades wherein open, bubbling pools of green slime festered in corruption, and once he hid himself fearfully as a monster scarabeus beetle lumbered within three yards of him, moving heavily onward with a clanking of limbs as of some mighty machine.

Burl saw the mighty armor and the inward-curving jaws of the creature, and envied him his weapons. The time was not yet come, however, when Burl would smile at the great insect and hunt him for the juicy flesh contained in those armored limbs.

Burl was still a savage, still ignorant, still timid. His principal advance had been that whereas he had fled without reasoning, he now paused to see if he need flee. In his hands he bore a long, sharp-pointed chitinous spear. It had been the weapon of a huge, unnamed flying insect scorched to death in the burning of the purple hills, which had floundered out of the flames to die. Burl had worked for an hour before being able to detach the weapon he coveted. It was as long and longer than Burl himself.

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He was a strange sight, moving slowly and cautiously through the shadowed lanes of the mushroom forest. A cloak of delicate velvet in which all the colors of the rainbow played in iridescent beauty hung from his shoulders. A mass of soft and beautiful moth fur was about his middle, and in the strip of sinew about his waist the fiercely toothed limb of a fighting beetle was thrust carelessly. He had bound to his forehead twin stalks of a great moth's feathery golden antennae.

Against the play of color that came from his borrowed plumage his pink skin showed in odd contrast. He looked like some proud knight walking slowly through the gardens of a goblin's castle. But he was still a fearful creature, no more than the monstrous creatures about him save in the possession of latent intelligence. He was weak —and therein lay his greatest promise. A hundred thousand years before him his ancestors had been forced by lack of claws and fangs to develop brains.

Burl was sunk as low as they had been, but he had to combat more horrifying enemies, more inexorable threatenings, and many times more crafty assailants. His ancestors had invented knives and spears and flying missiles. The creatures about Burl had knives and spears a thousand times more deadly than the weapons that had made his ancestors masters of the woods and forests.

Burl was in comparison vastly more weak than his forbears had been, and it was that weakness that in times to come would lead him and those who followed him to heights his ancestors had never known. But now—

He heard a discordant, deep bass bellow, coming from a spot not twenty yards away. In a flash of panic he darted behind a clump of mushrooms and hid himself, panting in sheer terror. He waited for an instant in frozen fear, motionless and tense. His wide, blue eyes were glassy.

The bellow came again, but this time with a querulous note. Burl heard a crashing and plunging as of some creature caught in a snare. A mushroom fell with a brittle snapping, and the spongy thud as it fell to the ground was followed by a tremendous commotion. Something was fighting desperately against something else, but Burl did not know what creature or creatures might be in combat.

He waited for a long time, and the noise gradually died away. Presently Burl's breath came more slowly, and his courage returned. He stole from his hiding place, and would have made away, but something held him back. Instead of creeping from the scene, he crept cautiously over toward the source of the noise.

He peered between two cream-colored toadstool stalks and saw the cause of the noise. A wide, funnel-shaped snare of silk was spread out before him, some twenty yards across and as many deep. The individual threads could be plainly seen, but in the mass it seemed a fabric of sheerest, finest texture. Held up by the tall mushrooms, it was anchored to the ground below, and drew away to a tiny point through which a hole gave on some yet unknown recess. And all the space of the wide snare was hung with threads, fine, twisted threads no more than half the thickness of Burl's finger.

This was the trap of a labyrinth spider. Not one of the interlacing threads was strong enough to hold the feeblest of prey, but the threads were there by thousands. A great cricket had become entangled in the maze of sticky lines. Its limbs thrashed out, smashing the snare-lines at every stroke, but at every stroke meeting and becoming entangled with a dozen more. It thrashed about mightily, emitting at intervals the horrible, deep bass cry that the chirping voice of the cricket had become with its increase in size.

BURL breathed more easily, and watched with a fascinated curiosity. Mere death —even tragic death—as among insects held no great interest for him. It was a matter of such common and matter-of-fact occurrence that he was not greatly stirred. But a spider and his prey was another matter.

There were few insects that deliberately sought man. Most insects have their allotted victims, and will touch no others, but spiders have a terrifying impartiality. One great beetle devouring another was a matter of indifference to Burl. A spider devouring some luckless insect was but an example of what might happen to him. He watched alertly, his gaze traveling from the enmeshed cricket to the strange orifice at the rear of the funnel-shaped snare.

The opening darkened. Two shining, glistening eyes had been watching from the rear of the funnel. It drew itself into a tunnel there, in which the spider had been waiting. Now it swung out lightly and came toward the cricket. It was a gray spider *(Agelena labyrinthica)*, with twin black ribbons upon its thorax, next the head, and with two stripes of curiously

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speckled brown and white upon its abdomen. Burl saw, too, two curious appendages like a tail.

It came nimbly out of its tunnel-like hiding place and approached the cricket. The cricket was struggling only feebly now, and the cries it uttered were but feeble, because of the confining threads that fettered its limbs. Burl saw the spider throw itself upon the cricket and saw the final, convulsive shudder of the insect as the spider's fangs pierced its tough armor. The sting lasted a long time, and finally Burl saw that the spider was really feeding. All the succulent juices of the now dead cricket were being sucked from its body by the spider. It had stung the cricket upon the haunch, and presently it went to the other leg and drained that, too, by means of its powerful internal suction-pump. When the second haunch had been sucked dry, the spider pawed the lifeless creature for a few moments and left it.

Food was plentiful, and the spider could afford to be dainty in its feeding. The two choicest titbits had been consumed. The remainder could be discarded.

A sudden thought came to Burl and quite took his breath away. For a second his knees knocked together in self-induced panic. He watched the gray spider carefully with growing determination in his eyes. He, Burl, had killed a hunting-spider upon the red-clay cliff. True, the killing had been an accident, and had nearly cost him his own life a few minutes later in the web-spider's snare, but he had killed a spider, and of the most deadly kind.

Now, a great ambition was growing in Burl's heart. His tribe had always feared spiders too much to know much of their habits, but they knew one or two things. The most important was that the snare-spiders never left their lairs to hunt—never! Burl was about to make a daring application of that knowledge.

He drew back from the white and shining snare and crept softly to the rear. The fabric gathered itself into a point and then continued for some twenty feet as a tunnel, in which the spider waited while dreaming of its last meal and waiting for the next victim to become entangled in the labyrinth in front. Burl made his way to a point where the tunnel was no more than ten feet away, and waited.

Presently, through the interstices of the silk, he saw the gray bulk of the spider. It had left the exhausted body of the cricket, and returned to its resting place. It settled itself carefully upon the soft walls of the tunnel, with its shining eyes fixed upon the tortuous threads of its trap. Burl's hair was standing straight up upon his head from sheer fright, but he was the slave of an idea.

He drew near and poised his spear, his new and sharp spear, taken from the body of an unknown flying creature killed by the burning purple hills. Burl raised the spear and aimed its sharp and deadly point at the thick gray bulk he could see dimly through the threads of the tunnel. He thrust it home with all his strength—and ran away at the top of his speed, glassy-eyed from terror.

A long time later he ventured near again, his heart in his mouth, ready to flee at the slightest sound. All was still. Burl had missed the horrible convulsions of the wounded spider, had not heard the frightful gnashings of its fangs as it tore at the piercing weapon, had not seen the silken threads of the tunnel ripped as the spider—hurt to death—had struggled with insane strength to free itself.

He came back beneath the overshadowing toadstools, stepping quietly and cautiously, to find a great rent in the silken tunnel, to find the great gray bulk lifeless and still, half-fallen through the opening the spear had first made. A little puddle of evil-smelling liquid lay upon the ground below the body, and from time to time a droplet fell from the spear into the puddle with a curious splash.

Burl looked at what he had done, saw the dead body of the creature he had slain, saw the ferocious mandibles, and the keen and deadly fangs. The dead eyes of the creature still stared at him malignantly, and the hairy legs were still braced as if further to enlarge the gaping hole through which it had partly fallen.

Exultation filled Burl's heart. His tribe had been but furtive vermin for thousands of years, fleeing from the mighty insects, hiding from them, and if overtaken but waiting helplessly for death, screaming shrilly in terror.

He, Burl, had turned the tables. He had slain one of the enemies of his tribe. His breast expanded. Always his tribesmen went quietly and fearfully, making no sound. But a sudden, exultant yell burst from Burl's lips—the first hunting cry from the lips of a man in three hundred centuries!

THE next second his pulse nearly stopped in sheer panic at having made such a noise. He listened fearfully, but there was

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no sound. He drew near his prey and carefully withdrew his spear. The viscid liquid made it slimy and slippery, and he had to wipe it dry against a leathery toadstool. Then Burl had to conquer his illogical fear again before daring to touch the creature he had slain.

He moved off presently, with the belly of the spider upon his back and two of the hairy legs over his shoulders. The other limbs of the monster hung limp, and trailed upon the ground. Burl was now a still more curious sight as a gayly colored object with a cloak shining in iridescent colors, the golden antennae of a great moth rising from his forehead, and the hideous bulk of a gray spider for a burden.

He moved through the thin-stalked mushroom forest, and, because of the thing he carried, all creatures fled before him. They did not fear man—their instinct was slow-moving—but during all the millions of years that insects have existed, there have existed spiders to prey upon them. So Burl moved on in solemn state, a brightly clad man bent beneath the weight of a huge and horrible monster.

He came upon a valley full of torn and blackened mushrooms. There was not a single yellow top among them. Every one had been infested with tiny maggots which had liquefied the tough meat of the mushroom and caused it to drip to the ground below. And all the liquid had gathered in a golden pool in the center of the small depression. Burl heard a loud humming and buzzing before he topped the rise that opened the valley for his inspection. He stopped a moment and looked down.

A golden-red lake, its center reflecting the hazy sky overhead. All about, blackened mushrooms, seeming to have been charred and burned by a fierce flame. A slow-flowing golden brooklet trickled slowly over a rocky ledge, into the larger pool. And all about the edges of the golden lake, in ranks and rows, by hundreds, thousands, and by millions, were ranged the green-gold, shining bodies of great flies.

They were small as compared with the other insects. They had increased in size but a fraction of the amount that the bees, for example, had increased; but it was due to an imperative necessity of their race.

The flesh-flies laid their eggs by hundreds in decaying carcases. The others laid their eggs by hundreds in the mushrooms. To feed the maggots that would hatch, a relatively great quantity of food was needed, therefore the flies must remain comparatively small, or the body of a single grasshopper, say, would furnish food for but two or three grubs instead of the hundreds it must support.

Burl stared down at the golden pool. Bluebottles, greenbottles, and all the flies of metallic luster were gathered at the Lucullan feast of corruption. Their buzzing as they darted above the odorous pool of golden liquid made the sound Burl had heard. Their bodies flashed and glittered as they darted back and forth, seeking a place to alight and join in the orgy.

Those which clustered about the banks of the pool were still as if carved from metal. Their huge, red eyes glowed, and their bodies shone with an obscene fatness. Flies are the most disgusting of all insects. Burl watched them a moment, watched the interlacing streams of light as they buzzed eagerly above the pool, seeking a place at the festive board.

A drumming roar sounded in the air. A golden speck appeared in the sky, a slender, needle-like body with transparent, shining wings and two huge eyes. It grew nearer and became a dragonfly twenty feet and more in length, its body shimmering, purest gold. It poised itself above the pool and then darted down. Its jaws snapped viciously and repeatedly, and at each snapping the glittering body of a fly vanished.

A second dragonfly appeared, its body a vivid purple, and a third. They swooped and rushed above the golden pool, snapping in mid air, turning their abrupt, angular turns, creatures of incredible ferocity and beauty. At the moment they were nothing more or less than slaughtering-machines. They darted here and there, their many-faceted eyes burning with blood-lust. In that mass of buzzing flies even the most voracious appetite must be sated, but the dragonflies kept on. Beautiful, slender, graceful creatures, they dashed here and there above the pond like avenging fiends or the mythical dragons for which they had been named.

ONLY a few miles farther on Burl came upon a familiar landmark. He knew it well, but from a safe distance as always. A mass of rock had heaved itself up from the nearly level plain over which he was traveling, and formed an outjutting cliff. At one point the rock overhung a sheer drop, making an inverted ledge—a roof over nothingness—which had been preempted by a hairy creature and made into

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a fairylike dwelling. A white hemisphere clung tenaciously to the rock above, and long cables anchored it firmly.

Burl knew the place as one to be fearfully avoided. A Clotho spider *(Clotho Durandi, LATR,)* had built itself a nest there, from which it emerged to hunt the unwary. Within that half-globe there was a monster, resting upon a cushion of softest silk. But if one went too near, one of the little inverted arches, seemingly firmly closed by a wall of silk, would open and a creature out of a dream of hell emerge, to run with fiendish agility toward its prey.

Surely, Burl knew the place. Hung upon the outer walls of the silken palace were stones and tiny boulders, discarded fragments of former meals, and the gutted armor from limbs of ancient prey. But what caused Burl to know the place most surely and most terribly was another decoration that dangled from the castle of this insect orge. This was the shrunken, dessicated figure of a man, all its juices extracted and the life gone.

The death of that man had saved Burl's life two years before. They had been together, seeking a new source of edible mushrooms for food. The Clotho spider was a hunter, not a spinner of snares. It sprang suddenly from behind a great puff-ball, and the two men froze in terror. Then it came swiftly forward and deliberately chose its victim. Burl had escaped when the other man was seized. Now he looked meditatively at the hiding place of his ancient enemy. Some day—

But now he passed on. He went past the thicket in which the great moths hid during the day, and past the pool—a turgid thing of slime and yeast—in which a monster water snake lurked. He penetrated the little wood of the shining mushrooms that gave out light at night, and the shadowed place where the truffle-hunting beetles went chirping thunderously during the dark hours.

And then he saw Saya. He caught a flash of pink skin vanishing behind the thick stalk of a squat toadstool, and ran forward, calling her name. She appeared, and saw the figure with the horrible bulk of the spider upon its back. She cried out in horror, and Burl understood. He let his budren fall and then went swiftly toward her.

They met. Saya waited timidly until she saw who this man was, and then astonishment went over her face. Gorgeously attired, in an iridescent cloak from the whole wing of a great moth, with a strip of softest fur from a night-flying creature about his middle, with golden, feathery antennae bound upon his forehead, and a fierce spear in his hands—this was not the Burl she had known.

But then he moved slowly toward her, filled with a fierce delight at seeing her again, thrilling with joy at the slender gracefulness of her form and the dark richness of her tangled hair. He held out his hands and touched her shyly. Then, manlike, he began to babble excitedly of the things that had happened to him, and dragged her toward his great victim, the gray-bellied spider.

Saya trembled when she saw the furry bulk lying upon the ground, and would have fled when Burl advanced and took it upon his back. Then something of the pride that filled him came vicariously to her. She smiled a flashing smile, and Burl stopped short in his excited explanation. He was suddenly tongue-tied. His eyes became pleading and soft. He laid the huge spider at her feet and spread out his hands imploringly.

Thirty thousand years of savagery had not lessened the femininity in Saya. She became aware that Burl was her slave, that these wonderful things he wore and had done were as nothing if she did not approve. She drew away—saw the misery in Burl's face—and abruptly ran into his arms and clung to him, laughing happily. And quite suddenly Burl saw with extreme clarity that all these things he had done, even the slaying of a great spider, were of no importance whatever beside this most wonderful thing that had just happened, and told Saya so quite humbly, but holding her very close to him as he did so.

And so Burl came back to his tribe. He had left it nearly naked, with but a wisp of moth-wing twisted about his middle, a timid, fearful, trembling creature. He returned in triumph, walking slowly and fearlessly down a broad lane of golden mushrooms toward the hiding place of his people.

Upon his shoulders was draped a great and many-colored cloak made from the whole of a moth's wing. Soft fur was about his middle. A spear was in his hand and a fierce club at his waist. He and Saya bore between them the dead body of a huge spider—aforetime the dread of the pink-skinned, naked men. But to Burl the most important thing of all was that Saya walked beside him openly, acknowledging him before all the tribe.

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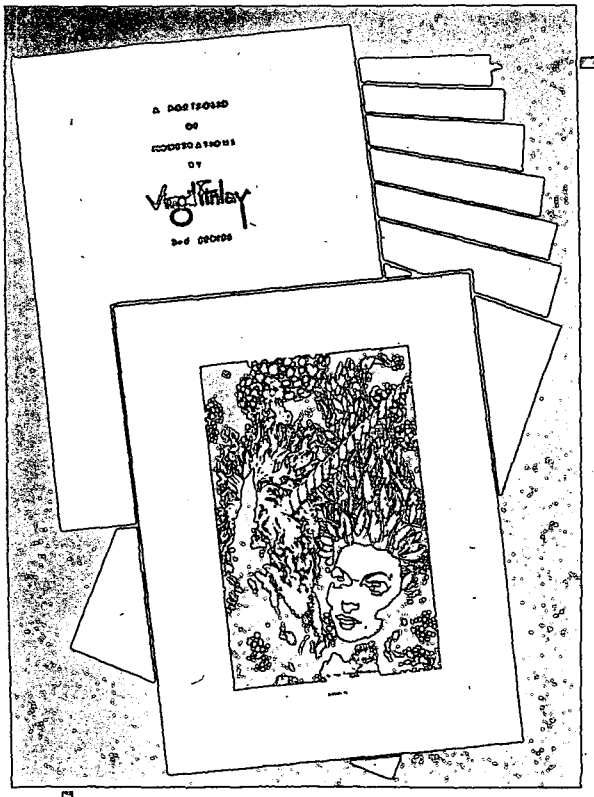

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ENVIRONMENT

Can a scientist change into a caveman in one split-second revelation of death's meaning? Dillon Weston had a chance to find out—or die!

By William Holloway

IS MAN really civilized? Or is his apparent civilization but an artifical cloak that hides the primitive savage underneath, and which, in time of stress, he flings aside?

Dillon Weston, who had soulful blue eyes and hair of the exact shade of gold which most women rave over, always answered the question with a positive affirmative. These declarations were generally made while sipping tea amid a group of feminine admirers of all ages from debutantes to bachelor girls, and were invariably received with rapturous applause. There is nothing the average woman likes better than to be assured of her absolute divorce from the primitive.

And then Fate shuffled the cards of life anew and rang in on Dillon Weston what can only be described as a cold deck of the very coldest kind. The Eastern College, in which he held an assistant professorship of geology, organized an expedition to make certain scientific investigations in the northern section of the Hudson Bay region. He was chosen to play an important part in the work, which included a study of glacial action in the north in those far-off days when Labrador and the New England States groaned under the weight of an ice-cap more than a mile high, and to his credit be it said that he preformed his duties well-enough to melt the stony heart of Fate had that organ been susceptible to emotion.

But Fate was ready, just then, to deal from the aforesaid cold deck. Exactly ten days before the expedition was scheduled to sail for home, Dillon Weston received his new hand.

They were examining the northwestern slopes of Hudson Bay, in that far region where the northern section of the Barren Grounds begins to stretch an arm, through unbroken desolation, across the Northwest Passage to the Pole. Trees, even the stunted willows that clink to lowlands, had vanished some distance farther south, and the tundra, the gray-brown of its rocky surface flecked with light-green lichens and the faded remnants of red and blue summer flowers stretched forbiddingly before them. Everywhere was evidence of glacial action in the denuded slopes of hills and in the chiseled scoring of rocks.

During the preliminary examination the members of the expedition were accustomed to scatter in order to obtain a general outline of their surroundings as speedily as possible. So it came about one morning that Dillon Weston found himself alone at the concealed entrance of a cave, where the strata he had been observing were more than usually interesting.

He was in the presence of an appalling ancient catastrophe. At some time in the far past a folding of the hills that could only be described as tremendous had taken place. Mighty mountain masses seemed actually to have buckled together, and in the throes of settling down to have flung huge masses of stone about like feathers. This had evidently occurred at the end of the Glacial Period, for parts of the un-

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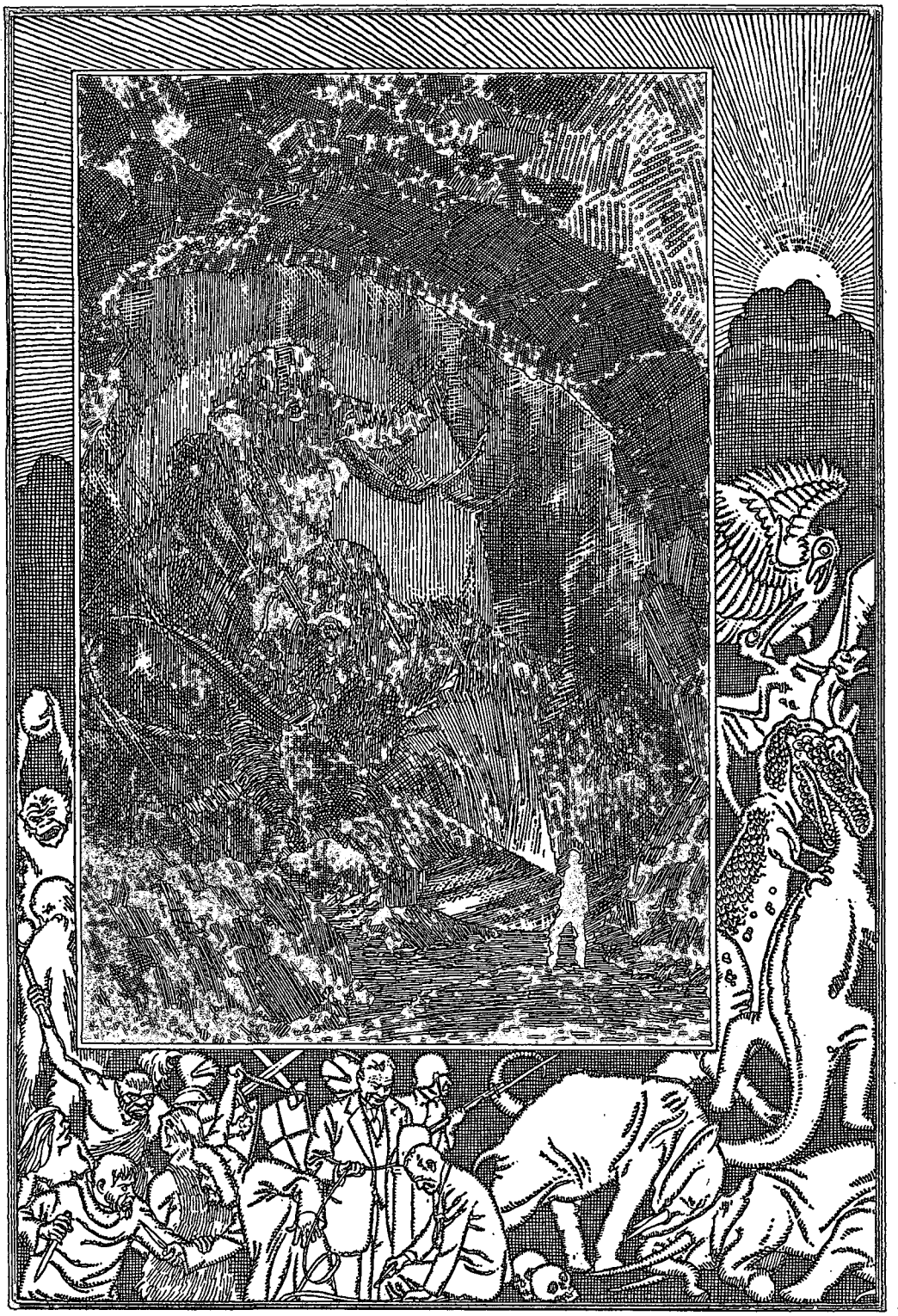

Imprisoned in the encircling ice, he saw the bodies of two gigantic maned and shaggy mammoths!

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heaved strata bore no trace of the action of ice.

Within the cave his powerful electric flashlight showed a wide, lofty chamber, winding indefinitely into the semi-darkness, and displaying on its rocky sides some unusual geological "faults." He took a few steps toward the rear; then a few more; presently, growing interested in his work, he found himself descending the sandy floor of a wide cavern, which ran steadily but gently downward, and which was dimly lit as he afterward discovered, through crevices high up on the mountainside.

The temperature was below freezing, which was only to be expected in a cavern in that region of the world, but it was so far below freezing as to cause him to resume his heavy gloves rather hastily. From the walls his flashlight struck vivid gleams from crystalline schists. He was some yards below the surface and an eighth of a mile from the entrance when the cavern ended in a solid wall of ice, the remnant, evidently, of an ancient glacier!

There could not be the slightest doubt about it. Caught and imprisoned between folds of the rocks, weighed down by millions of tons of dead weight, the ice had been preserved in that Arctic climate until his coming, and would doubtless last while the world stood.

It was all a fascinating spectacle for a geologist, yet Dillon Weston paid it scant attention. For there, plainly visible in the encircling ice, natural as they had been in that far-off day when they had fallen to their death upon the glacier, were the bodies of two gigantic, maned and shaggy elephants, which he knew to be not elephants but mammoths.

For a moment he was too dazed to do more than gaze at the extraordinary spectacle. The bones of the mammoth, the enormous prehistoric ancestor of the modern elephant, are to be found in almost every great museum. The dullest schoolboy would recognize those mighty curved tusks, which could toss a present day cow as easily as the cow takes vengeance on a troublesome dog. But the mammoth itself, in all the glory of his flesh and blood, has been found only once by man; in 1903, in the frozen soil of Siberia. And here was he, Dillon Weston, gazing at two absolutely perfect specimens, through a thin wall of ice!

For a moment, his breath came in gasps and his face paled. He had won one of the greatest prizes in his chosen profession. Presently, he knew, his name would run like wildfire around the world, and he would become famous beyond the average scientist's wildest dream. Which means, though Dillon Weston did not realize it, that if you canvassed a crowded meeting in Madison Square Garden you would find at least two men who could recall his name.

He enjoyed the little walk back to his chief, more than any other walk he had ever taken. And then Fate, judging the moment propitious, dealt him a hand, right from the bottom of the pack, that made him gasp.

THE work of removing the mammoths from the cave involved the widening of it at certan places and the installing of powerful hoisting apparatus. It would probably require two months at least, working in shifts—and navigation was even then closing!

"You'll have to stay all winter, Dillon, to see that nobody—none of those Eskimos, I mean—destroy your find," declared Professor Smithers, the head of the expedition, with an air from which there was no appeal. "It's by long odds the biggest thing the old college has ever done, and we can't afford to take chances. We'll build you a cozy cabin and leave you plenty of coal for your stove, and I'll have the carpenter double sash your windows. And as soon as the ice goes out of Hudson Bay next spring, we'll be back." He thought an instant. "The men have all shipped for the voyage, so I can't leave one of them, and the rest of us are all married. So I suppose you'll have to make out alone. Don't mind that, do you?"

"Not the least bit in the world," lied Weston cheerfully. "I've always thought it must be pleasant to try a bit of primitive life."

"Don't try too much of it, Dillon," advised Professor Smithers with ponderous jocularity. Then he smiled. Assistant Professor Weston, with his soulful blue eyes, his clerical father and grandfather, and his eminently decorous outlook upon life, was not apt to become very primitive. And Dillon Weston smiled in return; not in the least because he felt like smiling, but because it was so eminently the proper, decorous thing to do, considering that the head of the expedition was making the joke.

And then the vessel containing his colleagues steamed away and he was left alone in a comfortable cabin with a good

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stove and enough coal to last two winters if necessary. He had also a very satisfactory supply of provisions and an excellent working library. On a shelf above the stove he ranged the portraits of his father, mother, and grandfather, the two men in clerical garb, his mother wearing the black silk he associated with meetings of the Dorcas Society, while on the wall he tacked up a program of geological investigation to be pursued before the winter settled down in earnest.

The first night loneliness bit deep. Then, too, he had trouble with the hanging lamp which swung from the rooftree. When it had been put in order, and he had washed his blackened hands, he looked out upon the vastness of the starry night, listened to the wind amid the boulders, and realized, for the first time, the desolation that lay about him.

He was alone in a gameless wilderness, which had lain empty and sullen beneath the sky since the dawn of time. That he could ever make friends with the monster seemed preposterous. But, whatever happened, he must not allow it to master him; that meant despair, madness, death, the commonplace trio of Arctic winters.

September was a very pleasant month. Frost was comparatively light, and the snow confined to one or two scanty falls, so that he was enabled to do some valuable work in his special department. The long walks across the tundra gave him a tremendous appetite and began to broaden his shoulders and put muscle everywhere upon his tall body.

In October snow interfered with his geological work, but not in the least with his outings. He began to go about on snowshoes and, in order to save the battery supply of the powerful electric flashlights—specially constructed for the expedition—of which he had several, he installed in the cave a complete lantern service with a plentiful reserve of oil. For, of course, it goes without saying that he visited the cave each day to gloat over his wonderful discovery.

There was something fascinating about these daily visits. The gigantic forms of the slain mammoths—killed, evidently by a fall from a cliff while fighting, and buried in the slowly forming glacier—awed him by their very vastness. They had been subjected to immense pressure, as was evidenced by the clearness of the ice, and in the remote past had probably traveled many miles from the scene of their fatal quarrel ere the mountains had imprisoned their section of the vast glacier forever.

Their huge tusks were fortunately uninjured, so that he was able to admire their tremendous sweep at his leisure. Those of one of the animals were blood-stained, evidently from clotted blood which soiled the other's shaggy mane, mute evidence of the ancient battle. So much, the perfect outline of the massive bodies and tusks, was plainly visible; but even the powerful flashlight was unable to bring out the details of the picture. It was as though these monsters of the prehistoric world were still shrouded in the gloom of unnumbered centuries.

WITH the coming of November the cold grew more intense and the grip of winter was unrelaxing. The days were growing very short now, so that most of his time was spent indoors, where he busied himself with the writing of articles for scientific magazines and with a serious attempt at a book.

The wilderness now began to exercise insensibly upon him that dangerous charm, which to so many lonely men has spelled madness. The stars blazed with strange brilliance until the aurora dimmed them with its vivid coloring, when Weston spent hours watching the play of the mystic lights. Then there were the unaccountable optical illusions of the north: the apparent movement of rocks that he knew to be solid as the rock of Gibraltar, and which presently, he knew, would settle into their places again; the stars that seemed to fall with a hissing noise into the frozen mass of Hudson Bay, the animation which, at times, appeared to possess the most fixed objects of the landscape, causing them to circle about the cabin with a movement full of threatening meaning.

In this time of stress it was the practical, undoubted fact of his discovery that held him to the line of safety. Each day he paid a visit to the cavern, and each day came away with a firmer resolve that the world should not be deprived of these strange treasures even if he had to spend two winters in the north instead of one. And then, one morning in February, when he least expected it, the door of his cabin was opened from without as he sat writing, and a tall, fur-clad figure, followed by a shorter, very broad-shouldered one, appeared upon the threshold.

"Well, I'm damned!" cried the taller of the two, with a quick stare about him. "Double-sashed windows! Some joint, this!"

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Dillon Weston welcomed them with a puzzled air. The nearest white men, as he well knew, were hundreds of miles to the south. Yet here were two calling on him in the most casual manner in the world. "Come in, and shut the door," he said hospitably.

The shorter of the two, a dark man, with a black, ice-crusted beard, closed the door and came forward to the stove, where he stood combing the ice from his beard with mittened fingers.

"You probably heard of me before," he began. "I'm Sam Powers, the fur-trader, that owns the schooner *Lucy*. And this is my first cousin, Pete Ryan, who sails the *Lucy* for me."

The tall man, Ryan, who had now uncovered a hard-bitten, blond face, marred by an ugly scar diagonally across its right side, nodded confirmation.

"The Indians know us from the Little Whale River on the Labrador side, down through James Bay and round to the Nelson. We have the best outlaw trade in the bay. But now—" he shrugged his shoulders expressively— "oh, hell!"

"Stayed too late for once," Powers explained. "Got caught in a storm, driven over to this side, and frozen in about thirty miles to the south."

The eminently proper professor of geology, who was listening with eager interest, formed a striking contrast to his rough and ready visitors. Owing to the heat of the room he had pushed back the capote of the single-piece garment of fur that enveloped him from head to foot. The capote made a strange, pendulous excresence across his broad shoulders, above which his neatly brushed hair gleamed like the yellow nimbus of some missaled saint.

"Crew still on board?" Weston asked quickly.

"Three men and the grub-slinger," answered Powers. "I filled in as mate and took one watch, and Ryan here the other. She's pretty small, you see, and it's a business where too many cooks spoil the broth."

Into Weston's mind, as he listened, came some stray scraps of information regarding the *Lucy* and her unsavory reputation. When the Indians go into the bush in the fall to set their traps they take with them a winter's provisions for their family, to be paid to the Hudson Bay Company in the spring in the shape of furs. The business of the *Lucy* was to anchor in a convenient harbor and buy from the Indian hunter for cash or provisions the very furs he owed to the great company. It was an unpleasant business, based on the red man's broken pledges, and as such properly looked down upon.

Ryan, meanwhile, was gazing about him at the large microscope which stood upon the table, beside a portable typewriter and a pile of books; at the little slabs of roughly polished rocks, mounted upon tiny, wooden bases and ranged upon a shelf; at the pasteboard drawings of strange strata that lined the walls. "Some joint!" he said emphatically.

Weston smiled as he began to prepare his midday meal. Now that the surprise was passing away, he was conscious of a feeling of profound content at once more hearing the sound of a human voice. What he was not conscious of was the sharp glances which the newcomers fastened upon his store-closet when his back was turned, and the curious gleams of satisfaction that appeared in their keen eyes.

Half an hour later, as they sat over mugs of almost boiling tea, Powers hinted the real object of their visit. On the table was a tin of snow water, which Weston had melted that morning, but which, at a distance of ten feet from the red-hot stove, was slowly turning into a solid block of ice. The fur-trader tapped it roughly with his knife. "Rotten climate to be living in, isn't it?"

Weston nodded. "I had seventy below for three days straight last week," he remarked. "I had lots of coal, and I kept the stove blazing to the limit all day and all night, but things froze as soon as I took them off the fire."

"Got lots of grub, too, haven't you?" asked Powers.

Weston shook his head. "I took more than I thought I'd need by a good deal, but, looking it over yesterday, I found enough until June, and maybe a little over. I suppose I have about eight hundred pounds; that's all."

"On the *Lucy*," said Powers curtly, "we haven't any at all."

Weston laid down his fork. "Haven't any?" he cried. "Do you mean—"

"Mean!" interrupted the fur-trader roughly. "I mean we are starving. Do you get that? Starving!"

"Oh!" cried Dillon Weston, greatly shocked. "That's terrible!"

He was silent for an instant, his blue eyes clouded. The thought of starvation in that iron wilderness was too awful for words. And the worst of it all was that he could not help.

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"What are you going to do?" he stammered.

The black eyes of the fur-trader, which in their day had looked over many a tricky bit of fur, now bored into Weston's face as though in search of a hidden weakness he knew must be there.

"It's what you are going to do that counts, isn't it? I'm waiting on you."

"I'll give you what I can spare," cried Dillon Weston hastily. "But that isn't much". He thought an instant, estimating how he could curtail his daily allowance in order to help, and realizing the hopeless inadequacy of his assistance. "I'll give every ounce I can spare," he added, turning toward the store-closet.

"Spare!" broke in Ryan with a laugh. "Spare! Hear him say it! Hell!"

"There are six of us on the *Lucy*," snarled the fur-trader. "Do you think we want any of your damned charity? You haven't been long in the north, stranger, or you would talk differently. Up here it's man to man, and no favors, and the weak go to the wall. D'ye hear that? The weak go to the wall." He turned to his friend and barked, "Watch that side, Pete!"

TEN minutes later the host of the small dinner-party awoke from what seemed ages of slumber. There was a lump on his head where he had fallen on the edge of his bunk, and a generally bruised feeling throughout his body. From a cut on his forehead a tiny stream of blood ran salty in his mouth. His visitors were engaged in making two huge packs of the choicest of his provisions.

"Why, look who's here!" cried the fur-trader pleasantly. "Hanged if our little friend ain't woke up to say 'good-by.' I call that a classy, high-brow thing to do."

Dillon Weston lifted his aching head and stared earnestly at the speaker. "Where are you going with my stuff?" he asked hoarsely.

"Ain't teaching grammar in the college you was telling us about," remarked Ryan plaintively. "Else you'd say 'going with *your* stuff,' seeing that this chow has changed hands."

"As to our sailing directions," remarked Powers, "you can be sure we're not heading for the Lucy. There isn't enough chow for all, so we'd only be waiting round, watching each other die. We're going to make a sled out of some of your gear and then beat it down south on snowshoes about seven hundred miles to an Indian camp we know."

He bent over to his work, then suddenly straightened up at the crunching sound of snowshoes on the frozen snow without. His face had grown pallid. "God! Petey! It's the boys!" he whispered.

Ryan sprang toward the door, hesitated and turned backward as it was flung open in his face and four fur-clad figures hurled themselves helter-skelter into the room, a huge, red-bearded fellow, with a yellow, woolen scarf about his neck, in the van.

Not a word was exchanged. Silently, with a savage malignity that was all the more impressive from its entire absence of speech, the newcomers leaped upon the owner and captain of the *Lucy*. And, as silently, the others fought back.

Looking on, Weston could see a blur of surging forms, that swept across the overturned table and battled savagely, ferociously, up and down the interior of the cabin. The large microscope, with which he did so much of his work, was flung on the floor beside his shattered typewriter; the shelf of mounted specimens was torn from its place and his trophies hurled helter-skelter on the floor; and still the fight raged on, as though some savage animals had been struggling for supremacy in the heart of the jungle.

Presently, however, there came a lull. Powers and Ryan, bleeding from a dozen cuts, stood together beneath the window, one grasping the broken leg of the table, the other swinging aloft the arm of a shattered chair, while facing them were their assailants, leaning forward ready to spring again.

"Suppose we talk this thing over, boys?" said Powers, and even in the midst of his losing battle Weston noted the ring of courage in the man's voice. Whatever else he might be the fur-trader was evidently no coward. "I got something to say. If 'twasn't for me, you fellers wouldn't be here at all."

"Ah, hell!" said the red-bearded sailor shortly. "We know you met some Eskimos that was going south because the walrus had quit on them, and they told about the collidge feller being here. That's all right. And then you up and says th' on'y thing to do is to come up here and git grub. All right, too. But what ain't all right is fer you and Pete to beat it up here alone and grab it fer yourselves."

"It's this way, boys," went on Powers earnestly. "I figured the young feller wouldn't have enough for the bunch, so I put it up to Petey that him and me would get chow enough to last us down the coast

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till we struck White Bear's tribe. You remember White Bear that give us those black-fox skins last summer? Well, I cal'ate we could git grub and dogs there and come up for you, whilst if we all tried to make it, we'd die in our tracks. That's the truth, s'elp me!"

"Truth! Hell!" cried the red-bearded one. "I see ye going, but not a-coming back."

"Aw, shucks!" cried Powers indifferently. Weston, watching, could see him wetting his dry lip with his tongue as he played his last card. "Wouldn't we have to come back before the ice took the *Lucy* out in the spring? Say, wouldn't we?"

"That's gospel truth, Jack," one of the newcomers cried; and Weston could see that the trader had made an impression. "It sounds good to me," declared a second.

"What I say is this," Ryan broke in. "Let's cut out all this funny business and draw lots who's to go south. Two has got to go. Sam and me'll stand aside and let you boys choose among yerselves if ye want it that way. Then the rest stays here till help comes."

"Some shack!" cried one of the four, looking about him. "It listens good, Jack," added another. "Anyway, we've got Sam where we want him," said a third.

The red-bearded giant nodded agreement. "All right, Sam," he said gruffly. "Chuck down your club; and cooky, you get busy and let's have the best you got. Rustle some bacon first thing!"

"Righto," was the answer of the dirtiest and most villainous of the four as he stepped forward. "Got th' best uv everything, boys," was his awed remark, as he surveyed the packs which Powers and Ryan had shoved in the corner at the approach of danger. "Some chow, believe me!"

As Dillon Weston stood beside the stove the whole affair seemed both real and unreal, like one of those strange dreams in which the dreamer appears to awaken even while the dream runs on. The sunlight streaming through the window threw the interior of the cabin and its occupants into relief, with the clearness of a stereopticon. Surely this could not be the peaceful room in which two hours before he had been writing up his journal? The thing was incredible. In a sudden gust of anger he stepped forward.

"Where do I come in?" he demanded.

"Nowheres," answered the red-bearded man sharply. "And if ye give any talk"—he lifted a huge fist— "I'll show ye what o'clock it is." He laughed quietly. "Ye don't come in anywheres; we ain't got enough to go 'round as 'tis." He turned to the others. "What'll we do with him, boys?"

Dillon Weston, to do him justice, was no coward. When the fur-trader and his ally had attacked him he had been too dazed to do more than gaze at the astounding spectacle of their treachery. Now he had recovered his self-possession; moreover, he was angry in a cold-blooded way that made him dangerous; he struck him of the red beard a blow that echoed through the room.

Dillon Weston was a man of unusual physical strength; in addition, he had, as gymnasium work, taken lessons in boxing not many years before; so that the contest should have been fairly equal. But fighting, as practised in the rough corners of the world, is a very different thing from what the prize-ring knows as fighting, as John Morrissey once had the misfortune to prove.

As a boxer, red-beard would probably have made a wise audience laugh itself to death; as a rough and tumble fighter in a cabin in the Arctic, he proceeded to prove in a class by himself. As Weston, bleeding and defeated, lay upon the floor of the cabin, he felt an odd feeling of admiration for the man who had beaten him; an unwilling tribute to an enemy, but still a tribute.

"Game enough!" was red-beard's verdict as he stanched his bleeding face. "Question is, what to do with th' fool. There's not enough grub to go round. I say croak him."

"An have the college people come back next summer and raise the whole country up!" protested Powers. "I'm fer giving him a mite of grub and turning him out doors. Say he dies; somebody's got to die afore spring; maybe more than one," he ended darkly.

"And if he dies, it's only starvation," cried another. "We can say he got dippy and wandered away; lots get batty up here, everybody knows that."

SO IT came about half an hour later that Dillon Weston went into exile from the cabin in which he had fought his losing fight; went into exile with his furs and clothes, some cooking utensils, a small bag of flour, a few beans, and some pilot biscuit. He had plenty of tea, an article which the sailors despised, but not a trace of meat or fat. One of the men had proposed

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allowing him a tin of lard, but the suggestion had been frowned upon, lard being recognized as too great a delicacy to be lightly parted with.

That night he sat in the shelter of the cave, thinking over his misfortunes. Above him, suspended from a jutting rock, was the lantern he had kept in the cave to save his flashlight; in a hollow below him was a small stove, originally intended for the cabin, but discarded as too small, which the rascals had allowed him to take; in a pile beside him was a supply of coal, which he intended to increase next day, an agreement having been reached by which the overabundant store of fuel should be divided in equal shares. The lantern swung fitfully in the gusts that drove in from the desolate tundra, and the stove smoked.

That afternoon he had found a crevice in the rock that apparently led through a tiny hole to the outside world, for watching closely, it was possible to detect a faint glow of daylight. With a little work, he would be able to make an excellent chimney of it. Meantime, his stovepipe was not long enough to reach into the crevice, and the stove smoked persistently.

These, however, were minor discomforts. What mattered really was the unpleasant fact that he was now face to face with starvation as it is known in the north.

In that wide, desolate land he was quite alone. No animal life existed on the frozen wastes of the tundra; no bird crossed the gray sky; not even a walrus lifted a tusk in that awful stillness. Wherever he looked a white death seemed to wait mockingly.

Next morning he awoke at daylight and began the tiresome task of removing the rest of his coal supply to the cave. Powers, who stood beside the cabin, watched him carelessly as though he had other things to think of; from the interior of the cabin came the sound of loud voices, that of the red-bearded man more strident than the rest; evidently the inmates were not quite satisfied with the situation.

Later in the day, when he had packed the remainder of his coal to the cave, he set to work to make the place more habitable. The entrance was fairly narrow. Now he built a snow rampart in front of it, with a tortuous winding passage, leading by a narrow doorway into the cave itself.

With snow and water he fashioned a long tube that acted as an excellent continuation of his stove pipe and did away with the smoking that had annoyed him. And, having thus put his house in order, Dillon Weston sat down to wait for death.

A COUPLE of weeks passed, and, despite the strict limits he imposed upon himself, his supplies were practically at an end. Hunger was gnawing at him as in violation of his resolve, as he walked slowly across the tundra toward the cabin.

Suppose it were possible to regain possession of his stores? The idea startled him; then he put it aside as absurd; one man does not overcome six except by a miracle. From the cabin, as he approached, came a faint, far-away odor of frying bacon, infinitely enticing. His body was

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trembling, as he walked away, with the effort it had cost him not to abandon his last shred of self-respect and beg its inmates for food.

To change the current of his thoughts he returned to the cave, and, taking up the lantern, went into the recesses of the cavern to gloat over the huge bulk of the mammoths, which he hoped would become known to posterity as the "Dillon Weston Discovery." So much had happened since the arrival of the fur-trader that he had not once visited his prize. Now, as he stood before the strange monsters, coeval, as he knew, with primitive man, he became slowly conscious of a change.

The gigantic, shaggy-maned animals were no different from what they had been when his startled eyes first fell upon them —wonderful, scientific treasures at which the scholastic world would wonder.

The change was in himself. His sense of values was different. The bitter arctic waste, the barren tundra upon which wind blew the snow in huge drifts that were full of strange runic lines, the long nights when the walls of the cabin cracked from frost with the report of a rifle, the slow starvation which was weakening him each day—all had combined to give him a newer, more primitive viewpoint.

Far off in the old life he had left so long behind, the mammoths had a scientific and educational value. Now, as he stood in front of them, he was conscious of them only as a caveman would have been—as food! For the animals, killed by their fall upon the ice, and buried under snow and ice in the unbelievable cold of the Glacial Age, represented thousands upon thousands of pounds of fresh meat! And the man, muffled in furs to the eyebrows, who gloated over the sight, could have told you that meat was more than raiment, and a good deal more than all the colleges in the world.

He was staggering from weakness as he returned to his quarters for an axe. The fore-shoulder of one of the animals was within a few inches of the surface. A few minutes' labor freed it from ice, after which came the difficult work of cutting through the tough hide to the frozen flesh beneath; nearly half an hour's exertion was required before a huge piece of meat, dark as that of the walrus, lay in his hands. Two hours later, Dillon Weston could have told you that mammoth steak was the finest eating in the world, and, what is more, he would have believed it.

Two weeks went by in storm and tempest. Snow drifted into the pathway to the cave until it was entirely covered, and he was compelled to keep the lantern burning continuously, until he hit upon the expedient of making candles out of the tallow of the mammoth meat.

Thereafter he reserved the lantern for his visits to the far end of the cave, and did his cooking by the light of a pair of the strangest candles in use since time began. Then the storm ceased, and he dug his way out of the cave to the light of a perfect winter day.

But for his snow-glasses the glare from the white surface of the tundra would have been blinding. Far and wide endless slopes of dazzling snow reflected the light from a myriad crystals; the frozen surface beneath him creaked under his snowshoes; as he walked toward the cabin he was conscious, more than ever in his life, of the joy of living.

A silence brooded over his old home, that was not dispelled as he drew near. Pushing open the door, he found the owner and crew of the *Lucy* huddled around the fire. Evidently they had been unable to spare food to send two men south. Powers looked up, stared in surprise as though he had seen a ghost, swore softly.

"I've finished all that stuff I took away," Weston began. "Can you let me have a little more?"

"More? Hell!" exclaimed the red-beard. "There's one pilot biscuit left. And we're going to draw lots for that."

"I say divide it," said Ryan huskily. "Then every man'll git a taste."

"Aw, what's a taste!" scoffed Powers. "Let's draw. Then the one as wins gets a couple of real mouthfuls before he cashes in."

There was a little murmur of assent, and red-beard began assorting several slivers of wood. Weston stepped forward. "I'm in on this," he said sharply. "It was my biscuit in the first place."

Red-beard looked at him out of inscrutable eyes. "I told the boys you were a game bird," he said slowly. "Now you're showing it." He stroked his flaming beard with a monstrous hand. "When a man has a chance to live," he went on, "he sometimes has ter be hard; but when he's going ter cash in—hell! What's the use. I'm willin' ef th' boys is."

"All right!" barked Powers, and the rest nodded assent. "Give the guy a chanct fer a last bite," advised the cook. And the drawing began.

A minute later red-beard handed to

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Dillon Weston the prize he had won. Then he leaned back against the bunk and spat upon the stove. "Ye won it fair, young feller," said he briefly. "Now git t'ell with it."

As Weston walked rapidly homeward, the pilot biscuit in his hand, he recalled the scene in the cabin. Not a hand had been raised to stay his departure, though he had noticed more than one pair of shoulders quiver. Rough, hardened as the men were, they had stood true to their code—which is all that can be said for any man.

Two hours later he staggered into the cabin again, and flung a heavy burden on the table. And that night six men beyond the pale of law, and one erstwhile decorous member of a college faculty, ate fresh meat in a cabin where a red-hot stove was unable to keep water liquid five feet away, and found the room too warm; while the arctic atmosphere vibrated with the melancholy roaring of ancient chanteys. And in this manner did the wilderness take Dillon Weston to itself.

Even the complete loss of the mammoths did not upset him. Two tons of meat and fat had been removed and stored in the cave when the ice split asunder and the animals vanished beneath a projecting ledge, taking with them a funeral mound of thousands of tons of ice. But there was food enough to keep the little group from starving. And that, and not curio seeking was the essential thing, as Weston could have told you.

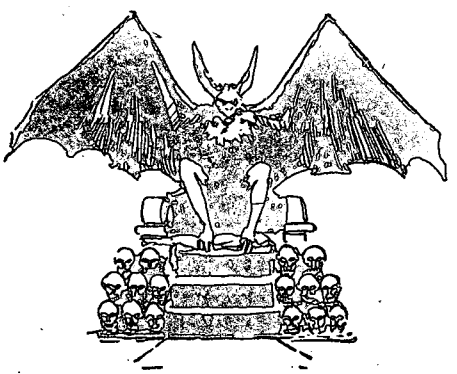
Professor Smithers, on his return in June, accepted the disappointment with scientific self-possession. "You're looking well, Dillon," he remarked pleasantly. "And I hope you didn't get too near the primitive when I was away."

Thinking of the six rascals, gone three weeks before, for whom he would always have a warm spot in his heart, Dillon Weston shook his head. He had, of course, no intention of mentioning his visitors. "Maybe I'm not a primitive type."

Professor Smithers looked down at his own neat rubbers. "Of course not, Dillon. You and I have left the primitive stage of evolution thousands of years behind. We could not possibly return to it."

Dillon Weston gazed across the gray-green surface of the tundra and smiled an inscrutable smile.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE



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(Continued from page 7)

WELCOMED BY LEGION POST NO. 49

Your issue of May with "The Moon Pool" by A. Merritt, and "Jason, Son of Jason" by J. U. Giesy, presented your readers both new and old, with a galaxy of talent in fantasy and appeal perhaps not matched in the publishing field of fiction.

Your decision to publish again after a long lapse of time *Fantastic Novels*, is welcome to the members of this Legion Post.

With well wishes for your success, and hopes that "What Do You Think?" department will remain a fixture of F.N.—I am

By direction,
ED. G. CLAYTON, *Post Adjutant.*

Otto M. Walker Post No. 49,
American Legion, Department of Florida,
Monticello, Florida.

P. S.: When, or do you plan to republish "Seven Steps to Satan?" Pass this suggestion along to the proper quarters—thanks.

Editor's Note: We expect to publish "Seven Footprints to Satan" in the near future.

VIRGIL FINLAY SUPERB

No word can possibly describe the thoughts I hold for the renewal of *Fantastic Novels*. Three issues have come into my hands and not a one has been a disappointment. I shall never again be without the newest copy as it comes off the press.

Your choice of "The Second Deluge" couldn't have been better. From the first word to the last it held me in its grip. If there are more stories by Garrett P. Serviss, don't fail to publish them in future issues.

Was rather amazed at the cover for this July issue. Could find no possible connection with the feature story. In fact I would say it is the worst you have had in the three new issues. Lawrence is good, but please use some theme from the story for the cover.

I guess I must be one of these younger fantasy fans. I have no idea what the Munsey group is that you speak about. But if the three selections you have given us are from that group, keep them coming at us. And, please, don't dare to forget A. Merritt every so often. I think he is one of the best, and so few of his works are available to us. Needless to say, I am waiting for "Conquest of the Moon Pool". If it is anywhere near as good as "The Moon Pool" it can't help but be great.

Whatever you do, don't let Virgil Finlay get away from you. He is undoubtedly the best fantasy illustrator that is in the field today. His art for the "Moon Pool" was superb, especially on page 21.

If we can't have trimmed pages for *Fantastic Novels*, I have a suggestion for fans who like to keep their issues in good condition. The part of the magazine that gets the most wear is the cover edge. A strip of scotch tape along all three edges, on the inside so it doesn't show, will keep the edges from being torn in handling.

Well, that is all for this time. Keep up the good work, get trimmed edges, and become a monthly.

GUY E. TERWILLEGER, JR.

1718 N. 27th St.,
Boise, Idaho.

LAWRENCE HIS FAVORITE

I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to your company for the splendid work it has done in reviving *Fantastic Novels* and providing the readers of fantasy with some of the best reading matter in this field. As a reader of s-f and fantasy of only some three years' standing, I could only read remarks about this magazine and the superb stories that had appeared in its pages in years gone by, but now I see that it has never been overrated. It is as perfect a magazine as there is on the morket today—the best artists *anywhere* and stories almost matchless in quality.

A. Merritt's "The Ship of Ishtar" is the best *fantasy* story that I have yet read. Notice I wrote fantasy; I have read about a half dozen s-f stories that I liked better. It is difficult to draw the line between science-fiction, fantasy, and weird fiction, but it seems to me that s-f would consist of stories developed around some idea in progressive science, while fantasy would concern itself with flights of imaginative adventure and beauty, sometimes horror.

In the May issue "The Moon Pool" by Merritt took most of the honors. Giesy's "Jason, Son of Jason" was good, but nothing compared to Merritt's wonderful little tale. Lawrence's cover was good, but a let-down from his master painting for "Ishtar". Finlay's drawings for "The Moon Pool" are among his best, and that is saying quite a bit, for Finlay, in my humble opinion, runs a close second to the dean of illustrators, Lawrence. Paul's work for "Jason" was the first of his that I have seen, and I was not very impressed, except for the one on page 95.

Lawrence's cover for the July issue is one of his best. His illustrations were fine, particularly the masterpiece on page 87. "The Second Deluge" by Serviss exceeds any world destruction stories that I have read in F.F.M. This must have been "World's End" month; the short story had a unique idea, to say the least. I have been reading your companion magazine since February, 1946, and this addition to the list of fantasy mags is more than welcome. Also, I like the idea of printing the book fiction in F.F.M. and the old mag fiction in F.N. More power to these two great publications.

I have several suggestions as to stories in future F.N.s. First, print as many Merrittales as possible. The supreme master of fantasy deserves to be printed in each issue. Second, I would like to see in F.N. or F.F.M. these stories: "The Door in the Wall", H. G. Wells, "The Wendigo", Algernon Blackwood, "The White People", Arthur Machen, and most of all: "The Shadow Out of Time" by H. P. Lovecraft and "Odd John" by Olaf Stapledon. Other stories by Wells, Lovecraft, Stapledon, Ray Cummings, John Taine, A. E. Van Vogt, Edmond Hamilton, Murray Leinster, Don Wil-

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cox, Eric Frank Russell, Clifford D. Simak, Henry Kuttner, C. L. Moore, E. E. Smith, Jack London, Edgar Rice Burroughs, H. Rider Haggard, and S. Fowler Wright will be eagerly read.

In conclusion, I give you praise for three near-perfect issues of fantasy magazines.

FRED RAY PAYNE.

Route 3,
Mayfield, Kentucky.

WANTS MORE PAUL PICS

I heartily disapprove of the July issue of *Fantastic Novels* for the following two reasons:

First, because you used "Finis" from an earlier issue of F.F.M., the May-June 1940 issue, to be exact. Surely you can find plenty of short fillers in the back files of *Argosy* and the other Munsey publications without having to resort to stories from issues that nine-tenths of your readers already have. I have noted that a large majority of your readers are asking for stories that have *not* appeared in F.F.M. and F.N.

Second, your cover is more likely to drive readers away than to attract them. That blue monster with the claws has been used so much on F.F.M. that it is getting tiresome. Also it looks too much like a weird tale magazine instead of the fantasy magazine that it is. And so far as I can tell, the cover doesn't represent any scene in either of the stories in the magazine.

A further criticism I have is: Why didn't you use Paul for the illustrations for "The Second Deluge?" His illustrations for that story as published in the Nov. 1926-Feb. 1927 *Amazing Stories* were superb. And again I note that a large proportion of your readers ask for Paul. You do have him on your staff, as witness the illustrations for "Jason, Son of Jason," or were they just left over from the originally planned 1943 publication of that story? If so, you should tell us so, instead of letting us continue to believe that we are going to get Paul.

PHILIP N. BRIDGES.

2426 19th St., N. W.,
Washington 9, D. C.

Editor's Note: The Paul illustrations were not left over. We will have some more new ones presently.

"ARISTOCRAT OF FANTASY"

I was greatly pleased to see that New Publications had revived the aristocrat of fantasy, *Fantastic Novels*. I now look for the great stories of fantasy to be brought back and printed.

I am glad to see that you intend to publish some great science fiction novels of the old days.

A few of the fantasy and science fiction classics I hope to see in your magazine soon are "The Planeteer", "After a Million Years", and "Seven Worlds to Conquer".

RICHARD S. LAYMON.

523½ S. Harris Ave.,
Columbus 4, Ohio.

THE RICHARDSON INDEXES

F. N. is firmly re-established in fandom! Considering all the praise and thanks that have been voiced in *Our* column, there is no question of it.

Most fans, rightly, place Virgil Finlay at the very top of the stf artists. He has the fantasy touch in his illustrations that we all like. But I was glad to see that Paul did the interiors for "Jason, Son of Jason." He did a very nice job, and they fit the story so well. We older fans always associate the Merrittales with Finlay; ERB stories with Allen St. John, etc. It is hard for a new artist to take over and get the same feel into the pics.

I noticed that many NFFF members *did* write. Russ Manning's letter should warm the hearts of a lot of the Old Guard, who have been so insistent on reprints of the good old classics. There are many such fans who have missed half the thrills in stf reading. So, keep up those suggestions, fellows, and we *will* see them reprinted one of these days.

The National Fantasy Fan Federation has just begun the *Richardson Indexes*. Here you find the stories and authors of all F.N. and F.F.M. issues, plus many other stf publications. A card will get you all information.

K. MARTIN CARLSON, *Sec.-Treas., NFFF.*
1028 3rd Ave., South,
Moorhead, Minn.

P. S. Thanks a lot for your swell treatment of Fan letters and Fans.

"SECOND DELUGE" A TREAT

Thank you for printing my last letter. My offers of trading old stf and fantasy books was taken up, in fact before I'd even seen the issue of the magazine in which my letter appeared. I still have a lot of books (300) to trade, and am still determined in my fight to bring fantasy prices down, and make available some of these old "classics" to the newcomer who never had a chance to pick them up.

Re July, 1948 *Fantastic Novels:* once again, I'd like to say my piece. The cover is very well done. But aren't these blue-faced, red-eyed monsters, slavering over some particularly luscious female, a bit overdone? Lawrence has the issue to himself, and while I admire his work very much, too much of a good thing is still too much. Along with other readers who have made their pleas, I am very much in favor of getting Hannes Bok to a few covers and inside illustrations. And how about Ed Cartier? Finlay is good, but a long way from his pre-war form.

No one in his right mind could cavil at your choice of stories for *our* magazine. They are wonderful. "The Second Deluge"! ! ! Man, O man, what a treat! It's a fantasy reader's dream come true. Once again I'd like to second the idea of running in one issue a listing of the more important fantasy and stf items published in the old Munsey magazines, and allowing reader-vote to influence (even a little) you in your choice of titles to appear. As we can have

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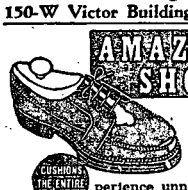

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but six issues of F.N. a year—let's make them the best six issues possible to put together!

For my own choice, I'd like very much to see again the Otis Adelbert Kline yarns of Mars. "Swordsman of Mars", "The Outlaws of Mars". "Jan of the Jungle", "Maza of the Moon", would also be enjoyable—and most certainly they are now unobtainable to the average reader. In these times of spiraling prices, it's a great service you are doing in making available for a quarter books that can't be bought for less than $10 to $15.00. Keep up the good work.

SAMUEL A. PEEPLES.

P. O. Box 4223,
San Francisco, Calif.

REQUEST

For several months I have been trying to track down information concerning William L. Crawford, the editor of *Marvel Tales*, the periodical which began in 1934 and was discontinued in 1935. So far, however, I have uncovered exactly nothing.

If anyone knows of his whereabouts—or of the whereabouts of his heirs and estate in the event that he is deceased—please have him get in touch with me.

Here are a few suggestions for future issues of *Fantastic Novels:* "Drink We Deep," Arthur Leo Zagat; "Lords of Creation," Earl and Otto Binder; the Robert Arthur stories and Nelson Bond stories which appeared in *Argosy* about 1940; "Earth's Last Citadel," Catherine Moore and Henry Kuttner; "Seven Out of Time," Zagat; "Minions of the Moon," and its sequels, by William Gray Beyer; "The Golden Boneyard," David V. Reed; "Seven Footprints to Satan," with the 1938 Finlay illustrations, by Merritt; "Maker of Shadows," Jack Mann; "The Green Flame," Eric North; "The Ninth Life," Jack Mann; "To Heaven Standing Up," "The Man Next Door," Paul Ernst; "There Was an Island," Henry Kuttner. In addition to these stories, I would like to second that request for another session of "The Blind Spot."

CORDELL MAHANEY.

1252 Magazine St.,
Vallejo, Calif.

WANTS MORE H. R. HAGGARD

Congratulations! At last you have given us back the best fantasy magazine ever published, *Fantastic Novels*. I have never written to you before because although I have the complete sets of F.F.M. and F.N. the new policy of printing only stories that had never appeared in magazines before lowered the standard of the magazine. The only exceptions being the Haggard novels and the Warwick Deeping story.

I won't say what stories I would like to see in F.N. as I have yet to read one that was not up to par of the Munsey Classics.

My only dissatisfaction with F.N. and F.F.M. is that they aren't monthlies.

NED REECE.

Rt. 2, Box 534,
Kannapolis, N. C.

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BACK ISSUES NEEDED

After seeing the first and second issues of the newly reinstated F.N., I can suppress my enthusiasm no longer. It is the answer to a fantasy fan's prayer, a vain dream come true! What promise it holds forth! What sheer ecstasy for those unquenchable souls, who eternally thirst for the elusive fountain of fantasy—fantasy pure and undiluted—the best in the field! And lo! it is within our grasp. Now there is but one thing needed to make our supreme happiness complete—making F. N. a monthly.

And behold Lawrence is superb! Each of his covers is a new delight. One of your readers said that his illustration for "The Ship of Ishtar" was lifeless. Nay, this cannot be. His picture has a poised charm, a subtle life-like attraction if you will but observe it. He has the priceless ability to capture a moment and make of it a thing of eternal loveliness. He instills in his work a timeless element, a serene touch that is rarely seen among present-day artists. Lawrence is best on the covers; Finlay is the champion of the inside illustrations.

I am but recently entered into the fantasy circle. Alas! I awake too late. I look back with sad regret on the many years of fantasy literature I have never experienced, an era of great authors and greater stories. But I still retain a little flame of hope that it is not too late to make amends. Have not F.N. and F.F.M. already opened my eyes? Do they not transport upon their pages the most brilliant gems of that lost era?

I am representative of your younger readers. I know very little about the old classics—only, in fact, that after a taste, I am increasingly eager for more and more of them.

"The Ship of Ishtar" was my introduction to Merritt, and immediately I am a Merritt fan. His novel truly deserves the name of classic. May he brighten the pages of F.N. often with his presence. As for the future, I would like to suggest the works of Lovecraft and Burroughs, always the favorites of many. Other than that, I shall rely on your discrimination to supply us with good fantasy.

I also wish to join forces with many of your readers in a plaintive plea for back issues of F.F.M. and F.N. It is my hope to build up a fantasy library, and I will welcome correspondence and lists from those who have fantasy items in good condition to dispose of.

DUANE R. SMITH.

25 Cary Ave.,
Oakfield, N. Y.

SATISFIED

I just finished with the July F.N. I have one question to ask: What on (or out of) earth was Lawrence illustrating on the cover? If it was supposed to illustrate one of the stories I recommend that you have him read at least one paragraph of the story before he makes a

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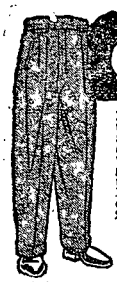

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picture for it. However, the inside illustrations for the novel were excellent. I can't say as much for the one for the short.

F.N. has started off with a bang for my money. The first three issues are tops. I enjoyed "Jason, Son of Jason" in particular. Which reminds me: I was never lucky enough to read the two antecedents to this story: "Palos of the Dog Star Pack" and "The Mouthpiece of Zitu." If any of our readers has these and wants to let them go (which I doubt) or is willing to lend them to me, I should be more than grateful.

Keep up the good work. I have no real complaint. If I had, I should not have enclosed my check for $1.50.

Yours with great joy and wishes for a continued F.N.,

MICHAEL J. KEENAN.

830½ Towner Ave.,
Albuquerque, N. Mex.

F.N. EXCELLENT

I have been reading fantasy fiction ever since the early days of *Weird Tales*, and feel that your F.N. fills a definite reader need in that you make available to them out-of-print material and give it to them in one big dose instead of spreading it out in installments over a period of months. Most of your selections, I think, are fine—but I would like to see more of our American authors and fewer English ones in F.F.M. Our English confrères, while splendid on characterizations, were never, I think, noted for action or plot novelty; and many of their so-called fantastics are mere philosophical and pedantic discussion of (usually) future world states, and as such downright dull. Except for Henry Rider Haggard. I've loved him ever since a kid (I, not he!) and own about 45 of his famous romances. Sorry, they're not for sale.

However, I recently rummaged up a few of the old *Weird Tales*, and can offer the following to any interested readers: March, Oct., Dec. 1927; March 1928; and Dec. 1930, all in excellent condition. Also, July, Oct., Dec. 1926; Feb. 1927, fair to good. Also June 1926, complete but dirty; and one August issue, year unknown (probably '26 to '28) but featuring Edmond Hamilton's "Crashing Suns," and Robert E. Howard's "Red Shadows," the first of the Solomon Kane stories. Also Arthur Leo Zagat's "Drink We Deep," in magazine serial form, rough but complete. Send a stamped self-addressed envelope for prices.

A. ZELITCH.

2301 Federal St.,
Camden, N. J.

INVIGORATING FANTASY

Thanks for the wonderful, the invigorating fantasy by J. U. Giesy, namely "Jason, Son of Jason". You certainly have done a good job thus far in the resurrection of F.N. First you

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

presented Abe Merritt's "Ship of Ishtar" and now Giesy's final novel in the "Palos" trilogy together with that bright little gem, the original "Moon Pool" novelette. Speaking of the Palos series, wouldn't someone please help me add the first two novels, "Palos of the Dog Star Pack" and "The Mouthpiece of Zitu", to my collection?

Lawrence's cover was a wonderful piece of art. And Finlay! Boy, was he on the beam in this issue! Another question: are you going to keep Paul? From what I've seen of his work, you should add him to your staff for keeps.

I only have one or two suggestions for future publications. I urge you to schedule for the earliest issue possible H. P. Lovecraft's novel, "Shadow over Innsmouth" although it was not a Munsey publication. Also "Prince of Peril" and "Planet of Peril" by O. A. Kline.

Orchids to you for a swell magazine. I only hope you will be able to appear monthly.

GARY WALKUP.

Route 1,
Spokane 16, Washington.

KNOW EGYPTIAN GLYPHS?

You have no idea of the pleasure your magazine gives many of us. The illustrations are "out of this world" and I wish they were done in color. Above all, in these days of poor fiction, there is nothing objectionable about your publication—it can be placed where young people are quite safely. Furthermore, much of the material is thought-stimulating. Merritt's descriptions are beautiful. I've always enjoyed his work.

And re Rider Haggard—one of your correspondents was very wrong. His work is very hard to find. "When the World Shook" has a delightful humor; wish you'd reprint it. Also Taine's "The Purple Sapphire" a book that I've read more than once.

I have here Stoker's "Jewel of the Seven Stars" and Chambers' "King in Yellow"—would like to exchange for Taine's "Purple Sapphire". Or the "Ship of Ishtar" (cloth-bound). The latter book is my pet of the Merritts.

Would like to get in touch with anyone who has a working knowledge of Egyptian glyphs. I think someone from Canada wrote in year ago that it was his hobby.

More power to you. . . .

JULIA SMITH.

4324 West 59th Place 43,
Los Angeles, Calif.

Editor's Note: "The Purple Sapphire" appeared in the August issue of F.F.M.

PRAISING SERVISS

I thoroughly enjoyed "The Second Deluge" by Garrett Serviss, but I believe "The Moon Metal" is his best.

Would like to add my voice to the throng, welcoming the return of F.N. In keeping with the policy of readers' suggestions, I nominate

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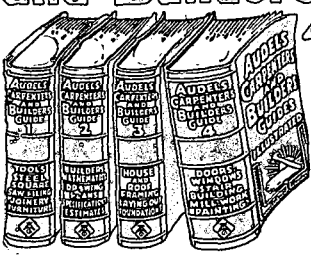

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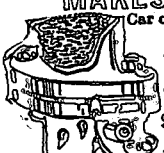

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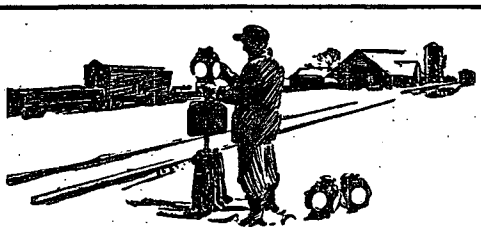

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George Allan Englands' "Air Trust", and "The Golden Blight".

Among other authors who should be represented are: Chambers, Shiel, Flint, London, Farley, Haggard, Stilson, Robbins, LaMaster.

Of course there are others too numerous to mention, but in closing I would like to cast my vote for an early revival of Smith's "Treasures of Tantalus".

For a successful '48,

R. F. DOLAN.

4 Archie St., Rear,
Chicopee Falls, Mass.

FINLAY FINE

On hand is the May issue of F.N., and the Lawrence cover is beautiful, but wrong. I am quite sure that Naiia could only sense him when he came to her with his spirit, and she could only see him when she herself was in the same state. But the cover is still beautiful, and Lawrence is still a good artist.

The stories were good; but the Merritt yarn was just some Merrittale that is representative of the fantastic, but not readable. I am still a stfist, and even "Woman of the Wood" failed to arouse me sufficiently to read it to the end. "Ship of Ishtar", on the other hand, was readable and good. Oh, well, it means that "The Moon Pool" won't be appearing any more for a long time, and will not occupy space to be given to a good, entertainable story.

I suggest that you investigate Dennis Wheatley. Look up "They Found Atlantis", "Uncharted Seas", "60 Days To Live" and "The Devil Rides Out". The first triad are suitable for stf and fantasy addicts, with the last reserved for weirdists and occultists.

Please use remaining Quatermains that are fantasy. And maybe "When the Earth Shook" and, the most important, "She" and "Ayesha".

H. G. Wells deserves space for "Men Like Gods", "In the Days of the Comet" and "Food of the Gods".

While we are the subject, why in heaven's name did F.F.M. print "City of the Dead" and "Devil's Spoon"? When I think of the space that could have been better occupied by England, Wells, Leinster et al, I smolder.

Let Finlay illustrate the fantasy in your pages and get Bok or Paul or Rogers to do the pics for "Mad Planet" and "Red Dust" which are both stf and scheduled for publication in F.N., I believe. Finlay has of late been doing splendid work on ghouls, demons, werewolves, vampires and the like. "City of the Dead" has good illos, but bad writing.

Keep on getting new fantasy and stf for the novels and shorts. The five authors that I would like to see in this capacity are Bradbury for fantasy, and Leinster, Hubbard, van Vogt or Kuttner for stf. Henry Kuttner's "Valley of the Flame" was good fantasy and Mr. Kuttner can write fantasy that deserves space in F.F.M. and F.N. Better still, C. L. Moore should be cajoled or coerced into doing a story like "Daemon" or "No Woman Born".

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I guess that is it, but I would like to say that all Michigan and vicinity fans should join the Michigan Society, because in this way you help out fandom. (And the Society.)

STEWART METCHETTE.

3551 King St.,
Windsor,
Ont., Canada.

WANTS ADAM LINK STORIES

I am glad to see that *Fantastic Novels* has returned from the great beyond. I see that you are asking for stories readers would like to see appear. There is one group of stories which I would like to see published. In my opinion they have been condemned to a sad and unjust oblivion. Those are the *Adam Link* stories. As they are seldom anthologized, they ought to be easy to obtain. In my opinion, they are among the best of science-fantasy and I'm sure your readers will like them. Read them and see.

DAVE LESPERANCE.

270 Leight Ave.,
Campbell, Cal.

GLAD TO SEE SERVISS

Glad to see "Second Deluge", sorry to see Lawrence on it instead of Paul. Sorry to see "Finis" too. A good tale, but not good enough to merit re-publishing. (F.F.M. May, June 1940, recall?) I hope you roused Finlay to do a good job on the "Conquest of the Moon Pool" cover. How's about coloring up the drawing for Part VI? That was a wonderful job. Any prospect of getting "Man Who Mastered Time" by Cummings soon? Also the "Polaris" sequels?

Best,

BEN INDICK.

443 Jersey Ave.,
Elizabeth, N. J.

Editor's Note: Yes, Mr. Indick, to both questions.

A TRULY GREAT TALE

"The Second Deluge" by Garrett P. Serviss in the July F.N. was a truly great tale. Serviss' novel (and especially Cosmo Versàl) was very interesting, well written and kept me enthralled from the first word, "On", to the last word, "it".

The short was also very good.

There is no need to comment on Lawrence's illustrations. This artist's work is always of the highest quality. The cover was well done, but don't you think slumbering dames and horrible crouching monsters have been overdone?

In the future be sure to give us more of Serviss and how about some of Merritt's scarer works, "The Fox Woman", "Dwellers in the Mirage", "The Blue Pagoda", etc.

GENE TIPTON.

710 Lamont St.,
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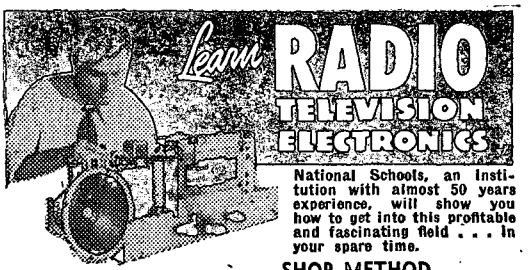

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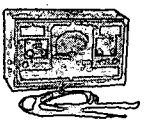

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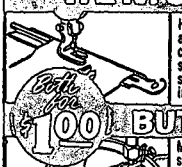

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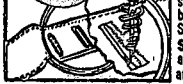

Makes button holes on your sewing machine instead of by hand. Also darns stockings, sews buttons, zippers; and can be used for quilting. Sews in any direction—front, back or sideways.

SEND NO MONEY—Merely send your name, address and pay postman $1.00 plus postage on arrival. Or, send $1.00 with order, and we mail attachments postage paid. You risk nothing. Satisfaction guaranteed or $1.00 back

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Quinsana Foot Powder helps give cooling, soothing relief to burning tired feet! Quinsana helps to absorb excessive perspiration, to keep feet dry, comfortable—and to combat foot odor.

Amazing results on Athlete's Foot! Tests prove that 9 out of 10—even advanced cases—get complete relief from itching, burning Athlete's Foot after 30-day Quinsana treatment.

Quinsana's *antiseptic* action helps prevent the growth of the fungi that cause Athlete's Foot. It works fast to end the misery of itching, cracking, peeling between toes. And daily Quinsana use helps prevent recurrence of Athlete's Foot!

Shake Quinsana on your feet. Shake it in shoes to absorb moisture. Use Quinsana every day!

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Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course *equivalent to resident school work — prepares for college* entrance exams. Standard H. S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

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Creomulsion relieves promptly because it goes right to the seat of the trouble to help loosen and expel germ laden phlegm, and aid nature to soothe and heal raw, tender inflamed bronchial mucous membranes. Tell your druggist to sell you a bottle of Creomulsion with the understanding you must like the way it quickly allays the cough or you are to have your money back.

CREOMULSION

For Coughs, Chest Colds, Bronchitis

FANTASTIC NOVELS

"SECOND DELUGE" WELL DONE

I have the third issue of the revived F.N. at hand and I just must write to you and express my satisfaction upon reading it. Yes, I was pretty well satisfied after I finished reading the whole magazine and it has been quite some time since this has happened!

The cover was an excellent Lawrence creation and he deserves orchids for it. I notice that he did all of the art work in this issue. So Finlay will have free rein with next issue's Merritt-masterpiece's illustrations, no doubt. I would like this cover better if it had shown a scene directly from the novel, but as it is, it is very well done.

The novel was very welcome, as I've heard so many times of this great work by Garrett P. Serviss. Though somewhat "dated" by some parts of the author's style of writing which was *the* style at the time he wrote it, I suppose, it lived up to my expectations. It is, by far, better than "Deluge" by Wright, which should be dropped from nominations to be printed in F.F.M. Thanks for giving us one more of the many great, old stories.

The illustrations for the novel were all pretty good. The ones on pages 65 and 87 were best. The one on page 87 reminds me of Lawrence's old bordered drawings so frequent and popular back in 1944-5 or thereabouts. I wish we could have more of them.

The short story was excellent.

Suggestions for future issues have been pouring in; have kept asking for Flint, Hall, Francis Stevens, England and many other great of "the old guard". All very well and good. You have been keeping up with these requests remarkably well and have done your best for us, which is plenty good. But lend an ear, please. There have also been requests, though not too many recently, for the work of Kline! It seems as if he is one of the old guard, too. Well, how about some of his work, then? Unless he has a pen-name, *not once has any of O.A. Kline's work appeared in F.F.M. or F.N.!* This ought to be remedied at once! I know we have a trilogy to be completed and many other wonderful stories wanted, but how about having "Thing of a Thousand Shapes" or "Planet of Peril" or "The Prince of Peril" or some of his others? I'm going to campaign on this subject! Anybody willing to back me up and help me? Come on you Kline-fans! *We want Kline!*

Edward Wood wants "Seven Footprints to Satan", I see. Yes, it would be nice, but we've had six Merritt stories (three novels and three shorter stories) out of eight issues of F.N. so far, with another Merritt novel coming next issue. Very, very good! But after next issue, if we *must* have another very soon, I nominate "The Fox Woman" which is very rare even now, for F.F.M. and have a Kline story in F.N. in its place!

Ed Cox.

4 Spring St.,
Lubec, Maine.

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Could YOU Be What He Is...If YOU Used The Hidden Powers of Your Mind?...

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Are you sure you would like to KNOW what the future holds for you—whether good or bad? Think twice before you decide whether it would be a curse or gift!

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Yes, most all of us have had unexplainable premonitions which events in the future bore out.

They make us realize there are things between sky and earth we little dream of.

Because you yourself know of such fascinating visions of things to come, you will be intrigued by one of the most unusual motion pictures Paramount has ever made. It is "NIGHT HAS A THOUSAND EYES."

It is a story...of a man whose uncanny knowledge of the future held so strange and strong a power over a beautiful girl...that he could name her exact Destiny on a menacing night "when the stars look down."

Come to scoff...but we warn you...you may remain to believe!

* * *

EDWARD G. ROBINSON
GAIL RUSSELL
JOHN LUND
in Paramount's

JOHN LUND tops his top-rank performance in "A Foreign Affair"!

HE TOLD POLICE

"Suppose you were on a train. You see a cow Two seconds later you see a tree Ahead, there's a farmhouse, not yet in your view The only person who could see all three things at once...would be a man on *top* of the train . . . or someone like me . . . who can see the past, the present...and the FUTURE!"

"Night has a thousand Eyes"

with **VIRGINIA BRUCE • WILLIAM DEMAREST**

Produced by **ENDRE BOHEM** • Directed by **JOHN FARROW** • Screen Play by Barré Lyndon and Jonathan Latimer

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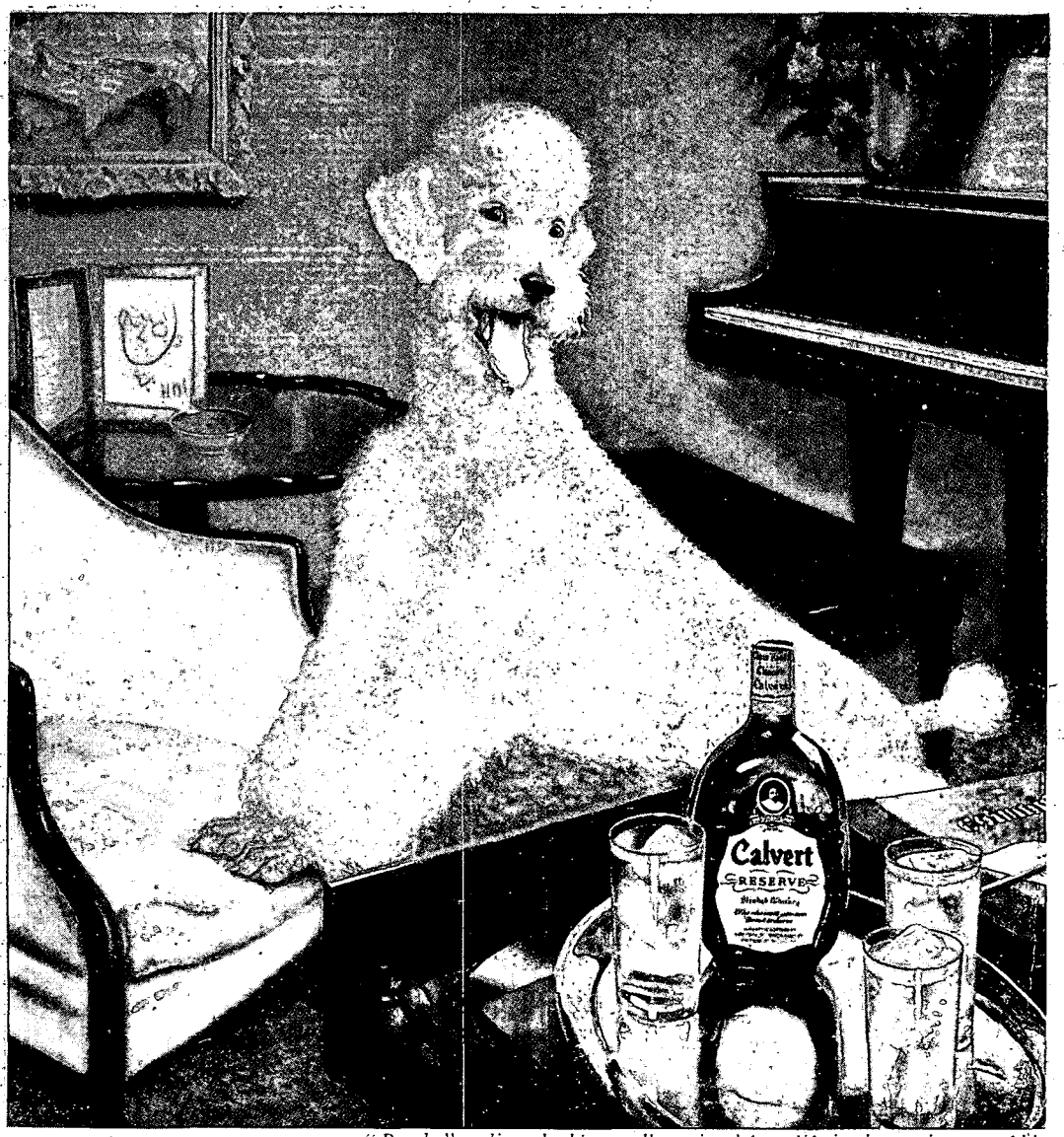

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